Professional Growth and Development: A Study of Exemplary Middle School Principals in Iowa

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PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT:
A STUDY OF EXEMPLARY MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IOWA

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The problem. The problem of the study was to describe the professional growth activities of exemplary middle school principals and to document what they perceived were conditions that influence their active participation , and the factors that influence their effectiveness.

Procedures. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with fifteen exemplary Iowa middle school principals who were nominated by their peer as having good understanding of middle school concepts, the change process, and child-centered schools. Qualitative research methodology was used in analyzing interview information and deriving conclusions of the study.

Findings. Three broad-based research questions guided this inquiry. The findings addressing those questions are:

a) Professional growth experiences that effectively contribute to the development of exemplary middle school principals typically are activities that: 1) meet the needs of the school district needs; 2) provide opportunities for principals to design their own activities; 3) allow for small group dialogue about middle school issues.
b) Conditions which influence active participation in processional growth activities center around supportive interaction with other administrators and family members, a principal's ability to deal with the change process, and maintaining a positive attitude toward the professional growth of themselves and their staff.
c) Other influential factors include: commitment to middle level education, enthusiasm for education , a strong work ethic, risk-taking, intuitive knowledge of what works for students, and promoting positive interpersonal relationships among staff and students.

Conclusions. Data from this study support the conclusion that collaboration with others is an effective professional growth strategy for middle school principals. Also, this study confirms previous research findings that indicate that situational context, dynamics of change, and personal characteristics, contribute to the success of school leadership.

Recommendations. This study suggests in-service providers examine the nature of collaboration in providing professional growth experiences and that district administrators encourage the professional growth of middle school principals as well as consider the leadership styles and personal characteristics of prospective middle school principals.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1900s, educators have sought to identify and implement educational practices which meet the needs of students in middle level grades. In terms of identification, these efforts have been successful. Reports on the status of middle level education indicate general agreement about practices which are most effective for youth in the middle level grades (Beane, 1990). In addition, the term middle school, as well as the configuration of grade levels, have gained widespread acceptance by middle level educators. Despite this on-going shift in attitude and school structure, research indicates minimal success has been made in terms of implementing practices which effectively meet the needs of today's adolescent (George, P. S., Stevenson, S., Thomason, J., & Beane, J., 1992). In reality, there is a gap between what research and literature say should be done and actual implementation of effective practices. For many middle level schools, educational practices remain remarkably similar to those of a half-century ago (Lounsbury, 1991; Pate, P. E., Mizelle, N. B., Hart, L. E., Jordan, J., Matthews, R., Matthews, S., Scott, V., & Brantley, V., 1993).

One of the most publicized reports describing the gap between identification and implementation of middle school practices is Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century (Carnegie Councils, 1989). Turning Points, as it is more commonly called, reviews the development of the

middle school movement during the 1980s and describes the best of middle level research and practice. It emphasizes the vital importance of middle level schools and makes recommendations for developing middle level schools into powerful forces for shaping the lives of young adolescents. While the report offers support and encouragement for continuation of efforts to implement new practices in middle schools, it also delivers a strong caveat regarding the difficulties of meeting the educational needs of the middle level student. Hamburg (Carnegie Councils,1989), president of the Carnegie Corporation, stated that even though there are perceptions of changes occurring in middle schools, "a volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents" (p. 8).

Despite the fact that a number of middle schools have not been as successful as was hoped during the past decade, some schools have implemented effective middle school practices (Beane, 1990). According to the effective schools research, this success may be due, in part, to the key role principals play in leading effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1983; Krug, 1992). Repeatedly the effective schools literature has confirmed that principals enhance the process of change needed to implement effective practices. As Steller, former assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Education, succinctly reported in 1988:

> The principalities is probably the single most powerful fulcrum for improving school effectiveness. A great school almost always

> boasts a cracker-jack principal . . . they do possess a fierce determination . . . and they radiate infectious enthusiasm for excellence. (pp. 17-18)

Research on the effectiveness of leaders has been attributed to many different factors including personality traits and leadership styles (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In addition, however, there is evidence to suggest that principals who are effective leaders not only possess certain characteristics, but they also participate in ongoing professional development activities (Barth, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1984). Researchers believe principals do not have sufficient knowledge and skills necessary to implement change (Asayesh, 1993; Lee, 1993) and need professional development opportunities in order to continually update their knowledge and skills to meet the ever-changing needs and demands placed upon the adults and students in their schools (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991; Sparks, 1993). Principals feel participation in ongoing professional development programs is needed to enhance their day-to-day performance and effectively guide school improvement. They express the desire to participate in such programs (Doud, 1989).

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

Research over the past several decades has clearly pointed out that principals are key in implementing effective practices in schools. Following this reasoning, then, if the middle school reform movement in this country is to be successful, much of what occurs to increase effective practice will depend on the leadership of middle school principals. While many school leaders

participate in professional growth activities to update their knowledge and skills, indications are that issues surrounding the professional development of all principals, and to a very real degree, middle school principals, is more complex than might be expected. If good leaders influence good schools, then what good leaders do to enhance their skills and growth is important to understand and is a primary rationale for conducting this study.

Specifically, the purpose of the study was to contribute to the current understanding of the professional development experiences of practicing school administrators, in particular those who are recognized by their peers as exemplary middle school principals. While findings from this study cannot be generalized to all middle school principals, this project was intended to help inform state and local in-service providers with descriptive stories of what exemplary middle school principals in Iowa regard as meaningful professional growth activities. It was also intended to provide useful information to superintendents and board members who are in a position to influence decisions about the professional growth activities of middle school principals in their districts. And finally, the study may be helpful to middle school principals seeking professional development experiences to improve their effectiveness.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The problem of this study was to describe the professional growth experiences of exemplary middle school principals in Iowa and document what they perceive as factors and conditions that impact these activities. Three broad questions guided the research effort. They were:

1. What professional growth experiences effectively contribute to the development of exemplary middle school principals?

2. What are the primary conditions which impact middle school principals' opportunities to participate in these activities?

3. Are there factors other than the activities described which contribute to a principal's ability to be an effective middle school leader?

Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework that guided this research effort initially focused on a review of literature that consisted of three broad areas. First was a review of the historical development of middle schools documenting attempts to implement effective instructional practice aimed at meeting the specific needs of adolescents. Also, it highlighted problems associated with implementing middle school concepts, specifically, the struggles professional educators face as they attempt to initiate change.

The second broad area of literature that framed this study focused on research regarding effective growth and development experiences for school principals. For this study, five broad areas, derived from research and current literature on the development of effective school leaders were used. These included: (a) Self-assessment and Goal Setting - the process individuals use in of identifying their own needs and goals (Barth, 1993; Lee, 1993); (b) Learner Input - a term used to describe a method by which professionals determine personal professional development by tailoring growth experiences to meet their needs (Asayesh, 1993; Hoyle, 1985); (c) Acquisition of Knowledge - the

means individuals employ to gain knowledge concerning a specific subject (Thomson, S. D., 1993); (d) Collaboration with Others - a number of activities aimed at supporting technical and emotional needs of professionals (Erlandson, 1994; Joyce, 1990); and (e) Field-based Learning - a means for leaders to develop skills and expertise from experiences in the actual work setting (Hallinger & Greenblatt, 1987).

The third part of the conceptual framework dealt with two elements of leadership theory. The first focused on the role of building level principals in developing effective schools and implementing new practices. The second related to the impact leadership styles have on the overall development and performance of individuals in leadership positions. Awareness of what the literature and research community has said about effective leadership styles and personality characteristics contributed to the overall understanding of the personal experiences described by the informants in the study.

The research design for this study was derived from a theoretical foundation of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi- structured interviews were conducted with 15 exemplary middle school principals in Iowa for the purpose of gaining insight and understanding about the professional growth experiences of selected school leaders. The principals interviewed for the study were identified by educators who are knowledgeable of the work of principals across the state. Exemplary middle school principals in Iowa were chosen for two reasons. First, as a group, the researcher felt they would well represent school leaders who were implementing middle school

concepts and, through their stories, be able to articulate a clear description of how professional growth activities may influence their ability to effectively carry out the roles and responsibilities of a middle school leader. Second, Iowa middle school principals were geographically accessible to the researcher.

The actual collection and analysis of the data was an iterative process of conducting the interviews, recording field notes, and making researcher reflection notes throughout the transcription process (Creswell, 1994). The researcher used the process of "de-contextualizing" (Tesch, 1990, p. 97) to categorize transcription data and to develop themes utilizing a process of constant comparison. Analysis continued throughout the writing process. After coding was completed for all interviews, portions of the text were cut and pasted onto large index cards. A meaningful story began to take form as information from the cards were "re-contextualized" into text (Tesch, 1990, p. 97). During the writing process, the information on the cards was read many times and patterns were constructed and reconstructed to depcit the evlolving themes (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Delimitations

The limitations of this study are:

1. The intent of the study was to provide insight into the professional growth experiences of 15 exemplary middle school principals in Iowa. The findings are limited to their perceptions of personal experience. Consequently, the conclusions cannot be generalized to persons outside the scope of this study, nor considered prescriptions for others to follow.

2. While steps were taken to minimize the effects of researcher subjectivity, it should be recognized that the scope of understanding reported in this study may have been narrowed by the researcher's own experience as a middle school principal in Iowa.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides an expanded review of the literature cited in this chapter and further details issues related to the middle school development and the professional growth experiences of the leaders in these schools. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, detailing the process used to collect and analyze data, while Chapter 4 synthesizes the findings derived through the interview process. Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the findings and draws conclusions of the study. In addition, implications are offered and recommendations are suggested for future studies.

Definition of Terms

Adolescent - child ranging in age from 10-15 years old; typified by changes in physical and emotional changes.

In-service - refers to professional growth activities designed for those working in the field (practitioners).

Middle School - refers to any combination of grades considered transitional from elementary to secondary school; combinations usually include grades 5-8, but may include lower or higher grade levels.

Middle School Concepts - an educational philosophy related to meeting the unique socio-emotional and educational needs of the changing adolescent.

Middle School Practices - educational practices associated with middle school concepts including team teaching, interdisciplinary curriculum, active learning, intramurals, advisor/advisee programs, block scheduling, and mini-courses.

Middle School Reform - a series of efforts designed to increase effective practices in middle schools. Middle school reform efforts are typically associated with an emphasis on middle school education through increased research; development of professional organizations; and increased inservices directed at practices to meet the needs of adolescent learners.

Professional Growth & Development Activities - refers to a variety of formal and informal educational experiences, such as workshops, seminars, or meetings, designed to provide job-related knowledge and/or skills.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter contains a review of literature that guided the conceptualization of this study. The first section provides an overview of the developmental history of middle schools. The second section describes five broad components of professional growth and development experiences synthesized from literature on the subject. The third section overviews literature related to the role of effective leadership by school principals.

Middle School Development

The conditions of society and expectations for youth have changed dramatically from those of past generations. In today's world young people face unprecedented choices and pressures. Caught in the middle of changing demands, many youth become alienated and experience failure at school. The number of youth who drop out of school, abuse drugs, and become unwed mothers has rapidly increased (George, Stevenson, Thomson, & Beane, 1992; Lounsbury, 1984; Urdan, Midgley, & Wood, 1995). Unfortunately, by age 15, substantial numbers of American youth are at risk of reaching adulthood unable to meet adequately the requirements of the workplace, the commitments of relationships in families and with friends, and the responsibilities of participation in a democratic society (Carnegie Councils, 1989, p. 8).

Middle level schools have the potential to be one of society's most powerful forces to aid youth in making a successful transition from youth to adulthood. However, schools often contribute to the problems of young

adolescents. Many young adolescents attend impersonal schools, learn from irrelevant curricula, and have a lack of trust for adults in schools. Schools are producing too few young adolescents with higher skill levels and problem-solving abilities that are needed in society. Millions of these young people do not receive the support and guidance needed to be productive, thoughtful, and healthy adults (George et al., 1992).

Efforts to reform middle schools are usually associated with development of new practices which occurred during the past two to three decades. However, many of the concepts credited to these times actually grew out of recommendations originating in the early 1900s. These early efforts were sparked by growing dissatisfaction with the state of education. The dissatisfaction spurred numerous reports recommending grade level reorganization in schools during the early 19th century (Melton, 1984). In 1909, a three-year intermediate school was established in Columbus, Ohio. By 1920, the number of junior high schools had grown to 883.

Plans for the first junior highs were based on knowledge of the characteristics of young adolescents and concern for all aspects of growth and development. The design was to provide students with skills for life while bringing more depth to the elementary curriculum (George et al., 1992). The ideals were designed to emphasize guidance, exploration of subject matter, independence, and responsibility. Descriptions of these early recommendations used terminology common to the language of middle school today. They included phrases such as: integrated subject matter, block scheduling,

exploratory courses, emphasis on student interest, and focus on student needs (Alexander, 1984).

Unfortunately, factors other than the needs of students soon influenced the early efforts to establish junior highs. As the post World War II baby boom moved into schools, elementaries faced overcrowding. Shifting fifth and sixth graders to a middle school offered an alternative to building more elementary schools. This alternative was also a means for reducing racial segregation which was being encouraged by neighborhood elementary schools in metropolitan areas. These factors prompted a rapid increase of middle level schools during the late 1950s and early 1960s (George et al., 1992). During this same time junior highs were being pressured to produce high performing students who would meet the increasing demands of high schools. High schools, in turn, were concentrating on preparing a few students for entrance into prestigious universities. Junior highs became watered-down versions of high schools, with teachers organized into academic departments (as they were in high schools and universities). The ideals which were conceived for middle level schools were considered secondary to the need to replicate the high school curriculum.

During, and following, this time of rapid expansion, junior high schools were burdened with serious criticism from those that believed a junior version of the high school did not appropriately serve the needs of early adolescents (Beane, 1990; Melton, 1984). The conflict between the ideal and the reality in the junior high school stood out most glaringly. The inadequacies

of many junior high schools became more and more obvious. In 1961, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published The Junior High School We Need. The authors described contemporary junior highs as a hybrid institution with an identity crisis endured by many of the young students within it (George et. al., 1992). This report, similar to early reports and others yet to come, identified the best junior highs as schools characterized by: moderate size, block scheduling, flexible schedule, teachers prepared for adolescent education, and instructional strategies designed to meet the growth and development needs of adolescents.

During the 1960s, there was a proliferation of books and journal articles about middle schools. As the 1970s unfolded, this trend continued with the addition of workshops and institutes about middle schools (Beane, 1990). This was also the time of the founding of professional organizations directed at middle level education such as the National Middle School Association. The increasing number of publications about middle schools, the growing body of research about early adolescence, and the organization of professional educators interested in middle school marked the onset of the middle school movement (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991).

A clear and firm national consensus emerged about the characteristics of the most effective middle level schools during the 80s (Beane, 1990). By the late 1980s educators' experiences with middle school had become increasingly positive. The benefits of properly organized and operated middle schools were recognized by teachers, administrators, and patrons (George, et al., 1992).

State departments of education began to recognize the benefits of middle school concepts and encouraged districts to use practices which focused on the needs of adolescents. Certification agencies increasingly recognized the middle school with specialized endorsements. In 1988 the National Middle School Association (NMSA) adopted resolutions which reasserted the uniqueness of middle level programs focusing on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents.

The resolutions from NMSA, along with other major national reports in the late 1980s, indicated a consensus on the critical elements of the middle school. Although this consensus did not represent new information, the consensus was welcome. Gordon Cawelti (1988), primary researcher of one of the national studies, reflected this in this statement:

> The middle school organization of grades 6-8 is most likely to provide the key characteristics or program features commonly advocated as most appropriate to the needs of students aged 10-14 . . . and middle schools are much more likely to use a teacher-advisor program, provide transition and articulation activities, use interdisciplinary teaching and block schedules, and provide staff development activities that extend the range of teaching strategies appropriate to their students. (p. 4)

Although there is a general consensus about the critical elements of middle school concepts, the effort to firmly establish middle school practices continues to be a struggle for educators. Even one of the most acclaimed

reports on the status of middle level education, Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century (Carnegie Councils, 1989), was met with a confrontation from the public. This report, which emphasizes the progress made in the development of middle level education, was misrepresented by headlines in newspapers across the county. On the day this report was released newspapers read, "Middle Schools Fail the Nation's Youth" (Cawelti, 1988). Establishing effective middle schools has proven to be a difficult assignment for American educators. In some districts, quality programs were never firmly established; little happened, beyond changing the name of the school and the grade levels of the students. In other districts, acceptance of practices became a standard list of middle school practices or features without a philosophical belief to carry out the practices. In many districts, exciting new programs were installed in the reorganized middle schools, only to disappear in a few months or years. Only a few schools established programs with lasting change. Those schools are now serving a generation of students in the same effective manner as they did when they were first established (George & Anderson, 1989; George, & Alexander, 1993).

Components of Professional Growth and Development

The disparity between what is known about good practices in middle schools and the reality of actual implementation of these practices sets the stage for increased efforts to help leaders of middle schools develop knowledge and skills needed to implement effective practices. According to literature on the topic of effective leadership and professional development, school leaders must

participate in professional development activities designed to meet their specific needs (Goodlad, 1983; Hoyle, 1985).

Although the literature repeatedly cites elements and practices which may contribute to the effectiveness of any principal, each is idiosyncratically influenced by personal characteristics, traits, styles, and situations. As George Thoms (1987) succinctly described his professional growth experience in attending the Harvard Principals' Academy Summer Institute:

> Professional development is very individualistic. While there were some very inspirational speakers, it was the interaction of the 100 principals with each other and the time set aside to reflect and engage in reading, writing and speaking about issues that brought about my rebirth experience. I left that two-week Harvard experience realizing that professional growth is something that happens inside us, something that happens because of what we do rather than what somebody else does to us. As a result of my Principals' Institute experience I have, during the past two years, worked seriously to improve and become more effective. (p. 8)

The individual nature of professional growth and development complicates study of the topic. However, comprehensive review of literature on the topic indicates patterns among what studies say are effective growth experiences for school principals. Five of the most frequently cited experiences were used to help frame the data collection and analysis stages of this study.

Self-Assessment and Goal Setting

The use of self-assessment as a means for goal setting and planning professional growth activities gained prominence during the 1980s. The process of self-assessment and goal-setting was validated as one of the professional growth experiences used effectively by principals (Barth, 1993; Carter & Harris, 1991; Lee, 1993; National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1991). Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) were two of the earliest promoters of self-assessment and goal setting. In their summary of characteristics and strategies employed by eight effective principals, they reported that principals have the potential to use self-assessment. They believed that principals know their own jobs, the needs of schools and the needs of the students they serve. They can and will organize and meet their own challenges and systems, given the needed support. Regarding the eight principals Blumberg and Greenfield stated:

> All of them were very skilled at analyzing and determining the requirements of their school situations, and evaluating alternative courses of action. This was, like their disposition to collect information as they moved through their work world, a continuous process. They were constantly sorting, sifting, categorizing, and interrelating phenomena bearing on the principalship. (p. 257)

In 1987 a series of articles was published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) pertaining to practices used by

principals' centers across the nation. In these articles self-assessment and goal setting were described as important initial exercises used to stimulate professional growth. In one of these articles, author John Mauriel suggested that "practitioners can define and describe their own needs. The centers, in turn, provide the necessary knowledge and resources to fill these needs" (Mauriel, 1987, p. 6).

The state of Texas has also been a leader in promoting the use of planning for professional growth of administrators. In 1984, the Texas Legislature mandated that all administrators develop a professional growth plan, a requirement which was met with varying degrees of enthusiasm (Wilmore & Erlandson, 1993). Since that time a principal center out of Texas A & M has sought to assist principals with this requirement through the use of The Management Profile tool, designed to structure assessment and goal setting.

Learner Input

In addition to a self-assessment of needs, the concept of the learner planning strategies for meeting those needs has substantial support from a number of resources (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Asayesh, 1993; Hoyle, 1985). Proponents of learner input in professional development believe staff development providers must let go of preconceived notions of determining what is best for learners. In contrast, providers are cautioned to be sensitive to learner needs and flexible in delivery of professional growth experiences. Principals' centers, for example grew up around the concept that principals, not so-called "experts", should shape their own professional development

(Asayesh, 1993).

Most recently, the Blue Ribbon Panel on AMERICA 2000, composed of educational leaders from across the nation, voiced their concerns related to national reform efforts. Among their concerns was the issue of learner input or involvement in planning professional growth. Professional development, they stated, has the potential for improving education "if education leaders at the local, state, and national levels have an opportunity to develop the program; share with each other what already works; and evaluate programs..." (Marx, 1991, p. 14). The sentiments of this panel coincides with what practitioners also say about "learner input" being a key for successful professional growth (Asayesh, 1993; Barth, 1993; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980). Becky van der Bogert, superintendent of schools, former staff developer, and current chair of the International Network of Principals' Centers, stated that Principals' centers "grew up around the concept that principals, not so-called 'experts' should shape their own development" (Asayesh, 1993, p. 15). She goes on to explain that the purpose of principals' center is to provide a vehicle for principals to get together, share ideas, and develop their own staff development plan and grow. Finally, she insists that the most effective leadership development is that which is shaped by the learners.

A team of staff development experts from Georgia conducted a nation-wide study to examine dimensions of educational leadership. In this study 12 dimensions were verified as important. Within these 12 dimensions 2 were perceived by outstanding practitioners as more important than others. Staff

development, defined as the development and facilitation of meaningful opportunities for professional growth was one of these two. They reported four major implications from this study. One of the four was, "involve educational leaders in planning and selecting their own professional growth experiences" (Heitmuller, Leuzinger, McAfee, Smith, & Pajak, 1993, p. 31).

Acquisition of Knowledge Base

In addition to providing individualized professional growth experiences, a uniform set of knowledge is critical for effective leadership by principals. Although changes in education are occurring at a record pace, basic knowledge of the profession remains a critical component for professional development. Research reports from professional organizations, as well as individuals, outline knowledge standards that reflect basic building blocks for growth (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1982; Hoyle, 1985; Thomson, 1993).

Professional organizations, along with universities, have launched major initiatives to develop standards for gauging the professional knowledge and skills of school leaders. Principals for Our Changing Schools, represents one of the most recent and comprehensive efforts to develop professional standards. This publication was a collaborative effort of 12 professional organizations, collectively called the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, all of which have expressed interest in bridging what has been described as the "clinical gap" between training programs and practical application of knowledge and skills. This document, according to the National Policy Board, constitutes

the core of what principals must know and be able to do professionally (Thompson, 1987). NAESP and AASA have also provided documents which offer standards for gauging the profession.

Two documents published by the NAESP, Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade and Proficiencies for Principals: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade (1991), represent efforts to provide leadership and guidance to those in the K-8 field. The Standards document identified those factors that exemplify schools of exceptional quality. It was designed to give states and districts a means for determining the degree to which their schools possess the ingredients necessary for providing quality education. In addition it should "help individual principals assess the quality of their schools, as part of the continuing effort to enhance educational opportunities for their students" (p. 2). The Proficiencies document was designed to provide a model for planning professional growth through the use of a common set of criteria used for personalized assessment and goal setting.

Collaboration with Others

Collaboration with others, networking, collegial support, and other terms have been used to describe the practice of talking with others about successes, failures, and frustrations of job experiences. These terms, along with descriptions of the practice that accompanies, have inundated the literature related to professional growth and development (Erlandson, 1994; Joyce, 1990). Collaboration is not complex or complicated. It is more a matter of

spending time together. As one principal described collaboration:

> Those of us who work as school administrators need to spend time with each other as a matter of support, counsel, and nurturance. We need to develop ways for that to happen, to work to establish networks, foster growth opportunities, and nurture supportive groups. (Thoms, 1987, p. 10)

The current wave of collaboration has been stimulated by discoveries made in principals' centers (Parks, 1987). The centers have provided avenues of communication, as well as sources for new information. Trained leaders are available to assist professionals with planning and feedback. Asayesh (1993) said:

> Like airline pilots who have to spend two weeks of each year doing the things they do every day but under supervision and with feedback, administrators periodically need a chance to practice their skills in a setting where experienced colleagues can help. (p. 15)

Principals in all stages of their careers consistently report collaboration with others as a valuable experience (Erlandson, 1994; Parks, 1987). Erlandson (1994) who recorded testimonies of new principals, as well as veterans, recommended that all principals should have support on the job from colleagues. "Within schools, the principal has no peers, and often communication lines with other principals and other sources of collegial support are minimal or non-existent" (p. 33). New principals, he stated, should have a comprehensive support program utilizing mentors and experienced principals

need to work on developing these collegial relations.

Field-based Learning

The desire for field-based learning is one of the components or practices frequently reported in literature related to effective professional growth and development of principals. The rationale for this practice in the field comes from many who have experienced theory-based training as less than satisfactory. Traditional pre-service training programs is the source for much of this dissatisfaction. In a 1989 survey of principals, Doud (1989) found that principals did not view their pre-service training as one of the primary contributors to job effectiveness. In contrast, 96.8% of the respondents cited "on-the-job experience" as the number one factor contributing to their success (p. 41).

Criticism of traditional training programs has centered around the gap between the application of knowledge and skills needed for effective job performance and the theory-laden courses found in the universities. Practitioners report the traditional training model as inadequate and unfulfilling lacking in the provision for technical skill development needed for instructional leadership (Hallinger & Greenblatt, 1987). Erlandson (1994) writes that frustration with theory-based training may be matter of timing rather than style of delivery. He studied the perceptions experienced principals for the National Policy Board in 1994. His findings showed that principals felt some of the theory and philosophy delivered during pre-service training could have waited until they had acquired on-the-job experience. Pre-service courses which offered performance-based learning were reported as more positive.

Available literature advocates field-based experiences, which focuses on increasing competencies in skills, rather than knowledge based on theory, as a primary element of successful professional growth and development (Asayesh, 1993; Rothberg & Pawlas, 1993). The use of field-based experiences for augmenting the professional growth of principals has become a common practice in "principal centers" and "leadership academies" across the nation (Greier & Draughon, 1987; Thompson, 1987). The field-based experiences, including role-playing, school visitations, and problem-based activities contributed to popularity and the rapid growth of principals' centers during the 1980s (Erlandson, 1987). In a Stanford program for principal development, where administrators have to do much more than absorb lectures, a group of principals designed and carried out a process for selecting teachers. The process included actual interviews, selection and discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the project (Asayesh, 1993).

The art of developing administrative leadership must combine knowledge and skills through applied experiences (Lee, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992). Lee, director of Peer-Assisted Leadership Program for the Far West Laboratory, believes that one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate the appropriateness of new leadership is to engage the participant in a first-hand experience of it and let them discover the benefits (Lee, 1993). As a basis for this position, Lee contends that leadership cannot be reduced to a uniform set of technical skills to be used in all contexts. Instead, Lee builds on the support of extensive research which concludes leadership as a contextual or situational

skill (Goodlad, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Leadership Roles and Styles

Leadership of school principals has been the subject of hundreds of studies during the past 30 years (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Many different themes and conclusions can be found within reports of these studies. Regardless of the variation, research has repeatedly described the leadership of building principals as a significant component of effective schools.

For the purpose of this study two areas of leadership theory were reviewed. These are leadership roles and leadership styles. Many differing definitions of leadership roles and leadership styles can be found with educational literature. The point here is not to debate the validity of the definitions but rather to report the essence of the research. Leadership role, in this paper, refers to dimensions of principals' day-to-day activities. Descriptive words conveying leadership roles might include communicator, facilitator, analyst and planner, politician, change agent, and technologist (Lewis, 1993). In comparison, leadership styles will be referred to as personal or individual characteristics. Descriptive words conveying leadership styles might include open-minded, enthusiastic, honest, and risk-taker (Lewis, 1993).

Leadership Roles

As an educational leader, the role of the building principal has come to the forefront of discussions concerning what is needed to make schools effective in today's society. Since the release of the Coleman Report in 1966, considerable debate has surrounded this topic (Block, 1983). The controversial

Coleman Report, along with other research efforts in the 1960s, indicated that schools had very little influence over student achievement. During the next decade, however, this idea was refuted by volumes of research on schools, indicating that many factors of school practice did have significant influence on the performance of students in schools. Collectively, this body of research became known as the effective schools research. Although the effective schools research indicated that no single factor could be considered responsible for high student achievement, strong leadership by building principals consistently emerged as one of the primary factors contributing to student success in schools (Edmonds, 1979; Goodlad, 1983; Purkey & Smith, 1983). This factor, strong leadership by principals, came forward in the educational world as important knowledge for future school improvement.

Educational literature which documents principals' successfully maintaining effective schools has undergone a paradigm shift. Volumes of research reports resulting from studies during the 70s and 80s centered around the development of a "prescription-like" formula that could be applied to process of developing effective roles for principals. These studies focused on identifying traits which are characteristic of principals who were considered to be effective. The traits research was based on the assumption that a standardized formula might be used for outlining the role of effective principals.

The traits research contributed to the overall knowledge pool related to principals' effectiveness, however, the theory of standardized application was refuted by studies which emphasized the personal and situational nature of

principals' roles (De Boise, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984). This later research revealed that each principal's setting was somewhat different from any other setting, and similarly, the individual nature of principals' personalities interacted with the educational environment in unique ways (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980). Consequently, the type of leadership and the ways in which the individual leaders adapt to, and manipulate environments, does not contribute to a model which can be prescribed equally to principals and their settings. Instead each individual and educational setting within which a principal works has different formulas for success.

The past decade of literature describing the role of the principal advocates a shift in the role of school leaders. This proposal is based on a long history of failure to implement lasting change through autocratic leadership roles (Guskey, 1986). Researchers and educational leaders during the past decade have documented the ineffectiveness of traditional roles in the implementation of new practices. According to theorists, long-lasting change has not occurred because leaders have failed to recognized the importance of two factors: participants' motivation for involvement and the process by which change takes place (Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). Although organizational system theorists have long known that there is a close connection between individual involvement in change and personal ownership of the change effort, leadership efforts have not been responsive to this knowledge. Traditional leadership roles derived power from the position and status as legal authority. Power invoked or exercised from this role led to conflict between principal and

teachers. Alienation resulted from conflict between the role of the principal and the personal needs (dignity, self-worth, and self-efficacy) of teachers. When the principal's demands and the teachers' personal needs conflict, teachers' productivity diminishes (Adams & Bailey, 1989). In contrast, if the principal and the teachers agree on goals (preferences), teachers' productivity and school climate are enhanced. Teacher productivity, in turn, increases student achievement, which is the ultimate goal of the study of leadership.

There is substantial evidence indicating traditional leadership forms, emphasizing a hierarchy in management, have not been effective for administrators faced with implementing and maintaining change in our school (Fullan, 1982; Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). Small and large scale studies of top-down strategies have consistently demonstrated that change innovations fail in the vast majority of cases (Fullan, 1994). In contrast, researchers and other educational leaders are advocating a facilitative leadership role. Leaders in today's schools must perform in a facilitative role, orchestrating shared vision, site-based management, team building, and collaboration throughout the school (Barth, 1993; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994). In order to successfully accomplish this goal principals must involve stakeholders in the decision making process (Asayesh, 1993; Clark, 1995). Principals create vision by viewing the whole school and outside influences on a regular basis. By sharing their vision with faculty members and others the principal begins to generate support and understanding for desired outcomes. The more people are involved in responsible ways, the more likely they are to support the results

of that involvement, and for a longer period of change (Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Principals who have managed to sustain change indicate "participatory decision making" and "leadership and philosophical vision" as the two most important strategies for implementing and maintaining change (George & Anderson, 1989).

If principals influence change through communication of visionary goals and shared decision-making (Asayesh, 1993) then the new type of leadership cannot be reduced to a set of technical skills which can be readily learned in the classroom. Instead, a shift in roles involves how we think about educational leadership and what current research emphasizes about what principals need to do in their day-to-day activities (Asayesh, 1993; Sparks, 1993).

Leadership Styles

Related to studies defining the role of the principal are studies which attempt to identify the most effective leadership styles of principals (Lewis, 1993; Manasse, 1984). Reports from the latter, however, offer a picture that is difficult to understand. The picture defining effective leadership styles might best be described as a prism reflecting many dimensions.

The purpose of reviewing leadership styles research is two-fold. First, it may assist the reader in understanding the interaction between self-assessment and planning professional growth and development goals. Secondly, it provides the reader with an awareness of diversity operating among effective educational leaders.

Leadership styles influence the effectiveness of principals (Lewis, 1993).

Unfortunately, there is little agreement on the definition and impact of leadership styles. Can leadership styles be acquired or are they determined by personality? Does one leader always exhibit the same style or can styles change to meet the situational needs? What factors determine a leader's style? Review of literature on the subject of style does not necessarily answer these questions. DeBoise (1984) said, in reference to the difference in styles that appear to be workable, "research needs to clarify how different styles and personalities interact with specific contexts to produce desirable or undesirable consequences" (p. 19). Leadership styles, as a subject for research, is in its infancy stage (Lewis, 1993).

Efforts to date have not been successful in discovering a model for explaining the impact of leadership styles. Investigations to ascertain the impact of leadership styles have led to the conclusion that specific styles are contextually bound and peculiar to the various personalities and settings that exist. The peculiarities are especially acute when applied to ongoing development of an administrator over the course of a career (Carter & Harris, 1991). Commercial purveyors of leadership style assessment instruments do make claim to accurate identification of characteristics of leadership styles. This identification process has been documented as an effective means for assisting in self-assessment. Self-assessment, in turn, precludes efficient planning for professional growth and development (NAESP, 1991).

Awareness of leadership styles provides insight into the diversity of effective leaders. Knowledge of leadership styles, however, should not foster

advocacy of a particular style. In fact, there is no convincing evidence which indicates leadership styles can be developed through training (Lewis, 1993). In contrast, terms which describe leadership styles parallel descriptions of personality characteristics which are not readily developed through in training programs. Although no single profile emerges from the portraits of effective leaders, similarities exist among descriptions of effective styles. Some of the similarities include, open-mindedness, enthusiastic, flexible, committed, personable, honest, and risk-taker, examples of words used to describe effective leadership styles. These terms also describe personality characteristics.

Insight developed through awareness of leadership styles may be most useful in creating a deeper understanding of the complexity of principals' performance. Interesting stories contained in reports of leadership style illustrate this point. For example, one author described a principal, who by any standard criteria, could not be labeled as even an average principal, except for one quality, his school worked. This principal fumbled routine administrative tasks and regularly blew assignments given by the superintendent, but he had one redeeming trait, he cared deeply for other people. Consequently, the author continues, when his faculty meetings started to fall apart due to his ineptness, his teachers stepped forward and carried the ball. Others did his work, and the results were fairly good (Steller, 1988). Another interesting occurrence was reported by Sergiovanni (1984). He told of Joan Lipsitz's experience of interviewing people about principals in "excellent" schools. She found that

people had difficulty defining what made them good. The most common answer to her question was, "You will have to come and see my school" (p. 4).

DeBoise (1984) offered a parallel explanation of leadership styles in his analysis of research by Blumberg and Greenfield. DeBoise said the value of these researcher's work does not lie in a list of characteristics, rather the research is significant for its descriptions of the principals and their own assessments of how they operate in their schools. Each of the subjects revealed different leadership styles and ways in which individual leaders adapt to and manipulate environments that are idiosyncratic. DeBoise's conclusions of leadership, which included analysis of several studies, encouraged consideration of a view that leadership encompasses "accomplishment of improvement according to their own abilities, styles and contextual circumstances" (p. 20).

Studies which focused on the individuality of principals suggest that the character of the principal is equally as important as the skills of the principal. In fact, Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) went to the extreme of claiming that almost anyone could learn the necessary skills to function as a principal. They insisted the character of the person was the determining factor between acceptable and excellent principals. They said:

> Most people can learn the necessary attitudes and skills that enable a group of people to function adequately. And it seems to be true that groups can learn to accept influence from a variety of people and to assign group functions accordingly. What seems not be true, is that

> anyone can assume the role of leading an organization--a school--in the direction of making itself better than it is. Other things besides democratic functioning have to occur and the suggestion here is that these other things start with the character of the person involved. (p. 245)

Summary

The developmental history of the middle school movement carries a story laced with turbulence. From the onset of efforts to implement effective strategies to meet the needs of the adolescent learner, school leaders have had difficulty coping with long-standing traditions and resistance to change. Although a certain amount of progress has been made in terms of identifying practices which are effective for the adolescent, the lasting implementation of practices has a history of failure.

Educational leaders have indicated that the practice of participating in ongoing professional growth may contribute to the success of implementing effective school practices. The literature related to this area spans several decades and offers a multitude of suggestions for leaders interested in pursuing professional growth. For the purpose of this study, these suggestions were categorized by the designation of five primary activities.

In consideration of effective middle school practices, the principal has been given credit as a key factor of success. However, researchers have demonstrated that effective school leadership does not result from any particular formula or set of criteria. Effective leadership, in contrast, has been attributed to a variety of factors including leadership styles, personal

characteristics, and the context of situations.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was derived from a theoretical foundation of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi- structured interviews were conducted as a means of gathering rich descriptive data. The interviews provided an opportunity for the principals to tell their own professional growth and development stories and explain how they have made sense of these experiences. Their stories allowed me to make meaning (Mishler, 1986) and explore insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) of various perceptions pertaining to professional development experiences of selected principals in middle school settings in Iowa.

Selection of Respondents

Respondents for this study were identified using what Glesne and Peshkin call "networking techniques" (1992, p. 27). I asked professionals, familiar with the work of middle school principals in Iowa, to identify principals for the study. These professionals included employees of two Iowa universities, the Iowa Department of Education, two area education agencies, and two professional organizations (School Administrators of Iowa and Iowa Association of Middle School Principals). Each of the nominators was contacted by telephone. I identified myself and explained the nature of the study and then asked the nominators if they felt confident in identifying exemplary middle school principals. Two of these persons, both university professors, declined the request. Each of the professors suggested someone they felt would be more

knowledgeable about middle level principals who fit the criteria for the study. In both cases, the person they suggested had already been contacted for nominations. A return call was made to one of the nominators who asked for time to think about the question and talk with a friend in another part of the state. One of the nominators used a directory of Iowa administrators as a prompt during the call.

I asked the nominators to identify exemplary middle school principals in Iowa and explain why they felt the principal was exemplary. They were not asked for a specific number of nominations, but they were told they could nominate as many as they liked. The number of nominees suggested by the nominators varied. One nominator offered only 4 names. Another nominator offered 18 names. The average number of nominees was 13.

When I asked each nominator to explain why (s)he felt a principal was exemplary, all of the nominators had difficulty separating one principal from another. Instead, they typically preferred to group the principals within a single list of criteria. Despite my efforts to probe why nominators cited specific individuals, most had difficulty separating one principal from another; they seemed to view attributes collectively. The most frequently cited reason for suggesting a principal for the study was, that the principals "understand middle school concepts." The second most frequent response was, "they understand the developmental characteristics of middle level students," and third, "they are child-centered." The entire list of criteria offered by the nominators is listed in Appendix A.

Prior to the end of the telephone conversations, the nominators were once again given my name and information needed to make later contact. The nominators were encouraged to contact me if they thought of another principal, or if, at a later date, they wanted to add or delete information they had previously provided.

A total of 39 nominations were made. I ranked the 39 nominations according to number of times he/she had been suggested. Twenty principals received two or more nominations and these people comprised the pool of possible particpants for the study. From this pool of 20 possible interviewees, I began the interview process. The actual number of principals interviewed was fifteen, based on the qualitative research assumption that once the point of "saturation" (Seidman, 1991, p. 45), is reached, or when interviewees no longer provided significantly different, or new information the interview process is complete.

Gaining Access

The first step in the data collection process was to gain access to the principals who had been nominated. Each principal was contacted by telephone. During the initial conversations I introduced myself as a middle school principal and doctoral student and I explained the purpose of the study. Each principal was told that (s)he had been identified as an exemplary middle school principal and asked if he/she would be willing to be interviewed. All of the nominees readily accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted by the researcher at a time and location convenient

to the principal. One interview was conducted in a meeting room of a convention center. Another interview was conducted in a university library. The remainder of the interviews were conducted in the principal's school office.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview format was used for this study because this technique, as described by Burgess (1984) and others, "is a conversation with a purpose" (p. 107). The interview process itself served two primary purposes for this qualitative study. First, it provided me with first-hand stories of principals' professional growth and development experiences, and second, it provided a means for exploring how principals make sense of their experiences and their beliefs or hunches about the issues (Merriam, 1988; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991). The semi-structured interview also ensured that consistent information was acquired from all the respondents, while at the same time provided opportunity for them to express ideas that might not have been included with a specific question (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Each interview was structured around three broad research questions:

1. What professional growth experiences effectively contribute to the development of exemplary middle school principals?

2. What are the primary conditions which impact middle school principals' opportunities to participate in these activities?

3. Are there factors other than the activities described which contribute to a principal's ability to be an effective middle school leader?

In addition to the three broad questions. A probe was used to encourage

respondents to provide details to their stories (see Appendix B).

Prior to the first interview, a pilot interview was conducted with a colleague who is a middle school principal. The pilot interview provided an opportunity for me to address some of the practical aspects of conducting interviews (Seidman, 1991). After the interview, I reflected on the experience with the interviewee and revised the question to add clarity and understanding. I began the interview by introducing myself, thanking the principal for taking his/her time to participate in the study, and explaining the interview process. Participants were also informed that the interview would be audio taped. Each participant was told that the information from their interview would be used with data from other interviews and that any quotes used in the study would not be attributed to individuals. I did caution each interviewee that complete anonymity could not be assumed, however, because nominators and others interested in the study would likely be able to identify principals nominated for this research study. Each person was given the opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form (see Appendix C).

The participants willingly told stories about their professional growth and development and appeared to be comfortable talking about the topic. In general, the participants seemed straight-forward and uninhibited about sharing personal experiences. The participants did not appear to be concerned with time. The longest interview was 95 minutes. The shortest was 45 minutes, with the average time of all interviews being 75 minutes.

At the close of the interview I thanked participants for their cooperation

and told them a summary of the study would be sent to them after completion. One asked to have a copy of the entire study instead of a summary. Each was given a copy of the consent form and a business card in the event they wanted to contact the researcher to add information at a later time. One principal contacted the researcher by telephone after the interview to add comments. I sent a thank you was sent to the participants following the interviews.

Immediately following each of the interviews, I spent time reflecting on what was said by making descriptive notes about particularly insightful comments (Creswell, 1994). These field notes (Patton, 1989) contained analytical impressions and interpretations (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These were later referred to during the data analysis and writing phases of the project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis and data collection was an iterative process. Additional notes were made during transcription as reminders of possible implicit assumptions or points for further consideration during other interviews. Following five interviews, I read the transcripts and began a process of "de-contextualizing" (Tesch, 1990, p. 97) whereby I took each principal's story apart and categorized it for an inter-person comparison (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This was accomplished by reading the transcripts and thinking about reoccurring themes or patterns. I assigned code words and colors to each theme and systematically coded every interview transcript according to designated themes (Creswell, 1994). After coding was completed for all interviews I cut portions of the text and pasted them onto large index cards.

Initially I coded 22 themes.

During the next step I "re-contextualized" the data by organizing the information on cards into a meaningful story or picture (Tesch, 1990, p. 97). I sorted and resorted the cards within the deck many times. This same type of reorganizing data and analyzing patterns continued throughout the entire writing process. As more stories were told, subtleties and assumptions emerged within the themes. During the process, I read the information on the cards many times. On several occasions I re-read an entire transcript of an interview to provide clearer insight into the meaning of a particular quote. Also, I used my journal notes to provide additional meaning to the text (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Organizing the data from twenty-two themes into a story which could be understood by others, was a immense task because some of the data overlapped among the themes. At one point it seemed logical to report the data according to the individual principal. This too, was difficult to understand. Another time I attempted to organize the data into one of six categories describing a primary trait of similar principals. I found that the most workable format was to organize the data around the broad research questions. Although this has proven to be a workable format, the reader should be aware that the respondents did not necessarily offer information in this sequence. Even though I used the same order in asking questions, the respondents jumped from one topic to another during their responses.

Researcher's Role

During the time I was conducting this research, I was also a middle school principal in a rural school district in Iowa where I have learned the language of middle school principals and have become increasingly familiar with middle school research and practice. In other words, I have "first-hand" knowledge of how middle schools work and, to some degree, how middle school principals learn from professional growth experiences. This knowledge and experience helped me to understand the complexity of the middle school, describe the experiences of others, and conduct semi-structured interviews designed to elicit insight and thinking form the principals I interviewed. As Lincoln and Guba (1985), and more recently, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) indicate, having prior understanding and insight is an advantage and a disadvantage to the qualitative researcher.

On the positive side, because this study is about a topic that I live every day, I was very interested in finding out more about what others, who are in the same role, have to say about the topic. This interest helped to sustain my energy in designing the study, carrying out the interviews, and analyzing the data (Seidman, 1991). On the other hand, because I was so familiar with the issues surrounding this research project, I had to take specific steps to ensure the "trustworthiness" of the data collection (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 148). I did this in several ways. First, prior to collecting the data, I wrote a detailed overview of how the project was developing and my feelings, intuition, and some implicit assumptions I had about the research topic. Second,

throughout the data collection and data analysis stages of this project, I kept a journal of my own thoughts as a way to monitor my interests and bias with the intent of minimizing any distortion of data (Peshkin, 1988). Third, although a common assumption that undergirds any qualitative research project is that the researcher's interpretation of findings are implicit (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987), I continually reviewed the audio-tapes and field notes in an attempt to separate my own perspectives on the topic from what the respondents said were important to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, another middle school principal, who is knowledgeable of qualitative research methodology, served as an external auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or critical friend. He reviewed several transcripts and compared the quotes with my report of findings to help ensure the accuracy of interview data and the findings of the study.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 exemplary middle school principals in Iowa and are divided into sections which correspond to the three broad research questions of the study. Responses to the first question are organized according to the five components of professional growth and development experiences described in Chapter Two. These are: (a) self-assessment and goal setting, (b) learner input, (c) acquisition of knowledge, (d) collaboration with others, and (e) field-based learning. The next section is organized around three major themes that emerged from the interviewees' responses to the second research question regarding principals' perceptions of conditions that influence their opportunities to participate in professional growth activities. The themes are: (a) influence of others, (b) influence of change, and (c) influence of principals' leadership. The final section includes a discussion of responses to the third interview question regarding other factors which influence principals' success as a middle school leader. Their responses are reported according to four broad categories: (a) commitment to middle level education, (b) intuition, (c) relationships with others, and (d) personal characteristics. Principals' comments in regard to their future concerns related to professional growth are also described in this chapter.

Components of Professional Growth Activities

In response to the first research question, respondents described activities and experiences which were important to them. Although each

interview was unique to the individual, commonalities were found among the descriptions. These commonalities are organized into five areas reported in this section. A summary figure of these five areas is given below.

Figure 1

Areas of Professional Growth

SELF-ASSESSMENT & GOAL SETTING

Intrinsic Motivation
Group Work
Reflective Thinking

ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE

Reading
University Coursework
Conventions and Meetings
Professional Organizations
Self-directed Study Groups

FIELD-BASED LEARNING

On-the-job Training
Mentoring
School Visitations

LEARNER INPUT

Self-selected Resources/Study Groups
District Administrative Meetings
Experimentation within Building

COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS

Informal Groups
Formal Groups
One-on-One Conversations

Self-assessment and Goal Setting

Nearly all respondents referred to self-assessment and goal setting as an important key to determining their selection of professional development activities. In general, this was described as an informal process rather than formal process. Most commonly, self- assessment and goal setting were part of

the day-to-day operations. They were referred to in conjunction with collaboration, reading, attending meetings, and reflective thinking. Several principals referred to self-assessment and goal setting in conjunction with their informal conversations with other principals. "When I talk with others, I am always comparing what they say with what I do. This keeps me on my toes and helps me determine my strengths and weaknesses. When I feel like I need to update myself, I find a way to do that." Another principal said that discussion with other principals helps to "refine my own thinking and determine what I need to do." A few principals valued discussion with others as a more productive means of assessment than conventions or meetings. In one case the principal expressed enthusiasm for attending conventions, but qualified the experience as less valuable than meeting with others about goals. "I have learned over the years that conventions get me excited, but they don't usually help me decide what I need. I used to think whatever the speakers said was what I needed. Now I rely more heavily on other principals' opinions."

Respondents also explained how self-assessment and goal setting were combined with reading or other professional development activities. "As I read [professional] journals, I evaluate myself. I'm always evaluating what I know about middle schools with what the literature says. If I read something in several journals I give it serious thought. If I think I need to know more about what I read, then I talk to someone else to see what they think." One principal said self-assessment and goal setting were elements of being a good employee. "I set my own goals. I always have. Even as a teacher, I would write down my goals

and take them to my superintendent and let him know what I wanted to accomplish."

Self-assessment and goal setting were talked about in conjunction with intrinsic motivation for keeping current on important educational issues.

> I am always thinking about what I'm doing and wondering how I can improve myself or my school. I'm very critical of what I do, but I think that is what allows me to grow. I journal about the things I do. When I find myself needing more information about something, I go out and get what I need to improve myself.

In another case the principal described himself/herself as a very nervous person. "Because I am so nervous, I'm always wondering if I can do a better job. Sometimes this hits me like a brick and I realize I need to get busy and learn more about middle school." Another principal felt compelled to use self-assessment and goal setting to stay ahead of nearby schools. Other schools were threatening because of the open enrollment option. For this principal, the a larger contiguous district provided a wider range of student offerings. "I have to keep evaluating what I do in order to stay on top of the other district. If I don't keep ahead of the game, parents may decide to go to the larger school."

Some principals talked about self-assessment and goal setting in more formal ways. Formal self-assessment and goal setting were accomplished during group work. In two examples principals reported progress of goals at each meeting. In these cases members of the group set goals at the beginning of each year and reported to each other during meetings. As a group they

offered feedback to each member who shared progress. Group members were seen as a support system in this process. "We spend time reflecting and assessing our progress on goals every time." Some respondents in these groups felt self-assessment and goal setting were productive with colleagues because it is a safe environment without job-related consequences. "I'm not afraid to ask the other people in the group their opinions about what I am doing. They will tell me what they think and I respect their ideas. You don't always want to let your superintendent or staff know your weaknesses."

Learner Input

The stories told by middle school principals revealed their initiative to provide input into their own professional growth and development. In nearly all cases, respondents desired to have input into the delivery of professional development services. The principals did not cite pressure from supervisors, state mandates, or constituents as a motivating factor for determining their professional growth needs. They did not look for someone to tell them what they needed. In contrast, they selected their own means for acquiring new information and skills.

Respondents described learning settings which offered opportunity for learner input. Study groups, mentorships, self-selected inservices, and self-directed experimentation were described as settings which allowed learner input. Small group meetings, for example, allowed participants to determine the agenda. One principal said,

I think you decide what you need by talking about it with others.

> You listen to others and analyze if it will work or fit within your own building. As you talk you can ask questions related to your needs. You don't have to waste time with things you don't need.

Another principal said, "So everyone talks about ideas and concepts, but you have to make it work for your own school. It's really unique. I guess it's kind of a rebellion against formal meetings. It's what we need, not what someone else thinks we need. It's not theory, it's really practical. No one is talking theory. We just talk about real practice."

Professional growth activities conducted within the district utilized the input of the learners. Administrative team meetings, for example, provided time for administrators to talk about the needs which were unique to the setting.

> Our team meetings help us pick up the loose ends which you carry around with you. During the week I make notes about things I want to ask other administrators. Some things are just logistical. But I usually have a question or two about something that I need to learn about. The team is a great source of information.

Similarly, district study groups provided learners with the opportunity to seek knowledge based on the needs of the learners. "Our study group developed into a great way of learning new information. You read about something and then you get a chance to hear other people's ideas. We can talk about it in terms of our situation instead of generalizing it like you do in college classes." Principals talked about inservice meetings that were selected for their district or building in the same way.

> Now that we have most of inservices in the district, we can ask our providers to tailor the program to our needs. This is better than going to a convention or outside meeting. You don't have to waste time listening to things that don't apply to you. The information is more valuable because it is what you need. It's not generalized to a diverse group of people.

Some principals felt the use of a mentor was an effective means of professional growth. For one principal, selecting a mentor was the first task when changing positions. "I find someone to be my mentor whereever I go. In fact, I will be leaving this position in a few months. I have already located a mentor for my new job. I use a mentor for locating resources, meeting colleagues, and discussing job-related concerns." Other principals utilized the expertise of experienced principals or superintendents as mentors to help them define options for professional growth. "I talk with my superintendent about my perception of needs. (S)he helps me evaluate my needs in terms of the district focus." Another principal said, "I talk with another principal whenever I am considering a new program. This helps me clarify what I am thinking and decide how I can pursue my goal."

Principals reported self-directed experimentation as a means for determining how to make school improvements. Experimentation was described as a means for gathering information about what works for middle level students. According to one principal,

> The school is like an experimental factory. Everyone in the factory

> works to determine how the system can function most effectively. Each person has to be responsible for letting others know how things are going by evaluating what is working and what is not working. In this way I can determine what is needed and, in turn, seek new information.

Similarly, a group of principals said they learned best by being involved. "That's why I haven't gone back to school. I'd like to have a degree but I can't afford the time to sit in those classes. I'm better off walking my halls; going to the teacher's lounge; and gathering my own information. That's how I learn about what I need." In addition, several talked about the value of listening to students.

> I learn a lot about what I need to do by listening to the students. They cut right to the core. If a program isn't working, they let me know. I thought our adviser/advisee program was going really well. Then some students asked me why they had an extra study hall. They were referring to the adviser/advisee program. I knew it was time to do some more learning.

Acquisition of Knowledge

Acquisition of knowledge about middle school concepts and practices was a key component of respondents' professional growth and development. With the exception of one principal, these respondents had little or no training in middle level education when they took their first job as a middle school principal or assistant principal. Some principals were transferred to a middle school against their will. In several cases, respondents were not even aware of the

differences between a middle school and a junior high when they began their jobs. Others had read or heard about middle school practices, but had no formal training for middle level education. Although the respondents began their middle school principalships with a limited knowledge base about middle schools, each one had elected to adopt a middle school philosophy and learn about practices which reflect the philosophy.

A variety of means for acquiring a knowledge base about middle school practices and research were described. Reading was the most frequently cited. Most principals reported the use of professional journals as their primary source for reading. "I mostly read professional journals. Occasionally I'll pick up a book and read the whole thing. But time is always a factor and so I prefer to read articles." Many principals said they kept a stack of reading materials from professional organizations and other resources to read when they had time. Several said they read bits and pieces of articles rather than whole articles. Two principals described reading as a routine part of their day. "Every morning I try and get through an article or two. I go to school very early and that is the only time I have to read and think about what I'm doing."

Another source of developing a knowledge base was study groups. The make-up of study groups varied among the respondents. Some groups were comprised of district administrative teams. Others groups were composed of middle school principals from several districts. Some study groups included teachers and principals in the same building. Each composition of study groups was reported as positive. Study groups had two means for

advancing knowledge of participants. In most of the groups, topics were studied for one or two meetings. " We have been using one or two sessions to study and discuss and issue. For example, we read some articles about adviser/advisee programs. Each member brought information and we jig-sawed the knowledge. The next meeting we focused on integrating study skills." Other groups studied a topic for a longer period of time. In these cases, the study group material was most often centered around a book. " Study groups are really the thing for us. This was a hard sell to board members because it was seen as just sitting around. In reality, it has given us a chance to all talk and grow. We have studied some great books about the change process and middle school education."

Along with their own acquisition of knowledge, principals explained how important it was for teachers to be knowledgeable middle school concepts. "After I found out some things about middle schools, I realized it wasn't enough for me to have knowledge, my teachers needed this knowledge too." Principals who participated in study groups with teachers reported the process was an efficient means for learning new knowledge. In these cases the principals felt it was more effective to learn new information at the same time as teachers because it saved one step in the process of applying new information to the building setting. "Sometimes it's faster to study with your teachers than to learn yourself and then try and teach them. When we use study groups we have a chance to learn a new piece of information and then start to chew it up together. As we talk about the new piece of information, we take our understanding to a

deeper level. It's a great way for me to get new knowledge and pass it on to the staff at the same time."

Principals had mixed feelings about acquiring knowledge through university based coursework. Several principals felt university coursework was not an efficient means for acquiring knowledge base. These principals criticized the focus on theory-based learning. Some suggested the lack of practical information kept them from pursuing advanced degrees. One principal said,

> For the most part these (graduate) classes were a waste, although in a couple of classes I had a professor who really taught me something that I needed. Those classes that were taught by full professors tended to be less useful than those taught by adjunct professors. I had an adjunct professors that was very good because he was a practitioner. He made us do problem-solving kinds of things and we did practical things that were really good.

Another principal explained, "You need an emphasis on application skills with a lesser amount of theoretical knowledge. I think you need some theory, but it's out of proportion in many university courses. If you fail on your job, it's not because you didn't understand the theory; it's because you don't pull together the skills you need. At this level it's the same for teachers and administrators. Being knowledgeable just doesn't cut it. You have to have practical skills to be effective."

One third of the principals, however, reported university coursework as a source of acquiring new information. Two of these principals specified Vision

Quest as a primary source for developing knowledge about middle school with teachers. These accounts described the Vision Quest program as a university course with a study group format. The course, taken by teachers and administrators, provided up-to-date research and a means for discussing issues important to the participants. Some principals emphasized the importance of friendships which developed with their professors. One principal talked about the difficulty in learning because the professor wouldn't allow students to talk about ideas during class. (S)he went on to explain that as the course continued, the principals decided to meet with the professor to share their concern over lack of interaction. This meeting resulted in a change of instruction as well as a long lasting friendship. Another principal described her instructor as a warm and caring person. This principal felt the positive relationship between instructor and students augmented the learning process.

Conventions and meetings were conveyed as a means for developing a uniform knowledge base for a few principals. One of the respondents who was initially unaware of the difference between a middle school and a junior high gained knowledge from a national convention. For this principal, attending national conventions was on a rotating basis for administrators in the district. When this principal attended the national convention s/he discovered that junior highs did not have to be modeled after traditional high schools. This awareness sparked an intense study of middle school concepts. Others discussed conventions as a resource for introducing new information for investigation and study.

Involvement with professional organizations was also described as a resource for acquiring new knowledge. The impact of professional organizations varied among the respondents. Most felt access to information through journals published by professional organizations and exchange of ideas through meetings sponsored were of primary benefit. Principals who were leaders in professional organizations cited additional benefits. One principal felt leadership in a professional organization provided access to information which was invaluable to his success. "If I wouldn't have become involved in a leadership role with IAMLE, I don't think I would have done so much with middle school development. The interaction with organizational leaders really helped me understand the importance of pushing ahead with adoption of practices."

Collaboration with Others

Collaboration with others was consistently cited as an important source for professional growth and development. Principals reported trust and respect for others as key factors of effective collaboration. Trust, according to the respondents, was something that developed over time. "At first, we were very careful about what we said to one another. We didn't get into much personal stuff." Groups became close knit as trust developed. "We are building trust because people are willing to talk about sensitive issues and trust the group. You have to nurture a little bit, but everyone has something to offer, you just have to give them a chance." Closeness was also reported as a caveat. Those who had developed trust said they felt protective of their group and didn't want to have anyone else join their group. When a principal moved to another district,

a new person joined the group. In the exchange, long-time members felt a sense of resentment due to the time it took to re-build trust and respect.

Collaboration with others included telephone calls, informal meetings, and formal meetings. The most frequently reported form of collaboration was small informal group interaction. In most cases, small groups were developed through principals' own initiative. This meant seeking out principals from other districts in most settings. In a few cases, larger districts, principals talked with others in their own district. Respondents talked about becoming acquainted with neighboring principals through local events or meetings. As they became familiar with others, they developed informal networks with telephone calls. In many situations these networks developed into a regularly scheduled meeting to talk together. "I've grown closer to a number of building principals because of the opportunities to meet with them. I got so I would call them about this or that and they could call me. I think informal networks are created out of formal networks."

Several principals joined a collaborative group at the invitation of an outside facilitator. In the examples cited, the outside facilitator was an area education agency consultant who was knowledgeable of group process and was in a position to initiate meetings. Principals in these groups described the collaboration efforts as formal. Monthly meetings were held with an agenda and goals. Members who participated in the more formal groups over a period of several years felt the collaboration became informal over time. According to their perceptions, the meetings were informal when the outside facilitator no

longer attended. "It started out as a very formal process. We had two facilitators. It was really structured. Over time we got to know one another and didn't need a facilitator. We still have an agenda, but we do some informal talking too." Technical assistance was one of the reasons why principals collaborated with others. Several described how other principals helped them learn about middle school concepts and management techniques.

> You talk about professional development, that's a critical piece that people don't have. When I started in the middle school I had nobody. I had support, but not the kind I needed. I had the old, " it's okay", type of support, but not the "this is what the middle school looks like, this is where you need to go".

One principal explained how technical assistance from others assisted with "everything from construction of a new facility to planning a fire drill." Some expressed pleasure in talking with others in a relaxed manner without worrying about a grade. "They are relaxed. There's no pass/fail or grade. You don't have to write a paper or turn anything in. You're just pursuing growth for it's own sake. It's not the just the information, it's also the process that's important."

Middle school colleagues were described as people who had the best insight into the practical application of middle school concepts. In reference to other middle school principals, respondents described respect for the information offered. "When you talk with other middle school principals you get practical information. You can ask questions whenever you want to and you know the answers will be helpful, because the people are working in middle

schools." Principals validated their respect for their peers through allocation of time. In description of professional growth activities, they often said they didn't have time to attend meetings or conventions. These principals did, however, have time to attend informal meetings with other middle school principals. In several cases the researcher asked how principals made time for collaboration. The principals consistently said collaboration was so beneficial they just made time for it.

Personal support was also cited as a reason for collaborating with others. Some said collaboration helped relieve their feelings of isolation, frustration, and loneliness. "I don't know about you, but I feel like I'm here all by myself. Sometimes you think you are the only one who is struggling with a problem. When you hear someone else talk about the same problem you feel a sense of relief and comfort." Principals in rural areas also emphasized the importance of meeting with others to get away from critical observers who seem to be everywhere. "You and I know that when your in a small community, people are watching every move you make. It is a relief just to sit down with a group that I can say anything I want without being criticized." Some principals discussed feelings of personal support from others as an important part of maintaining high performance. They explained how collaboration helped them feel better as a person because others provided them with encouragement and positive reinforcement. Another respondent said collaboration with others provided a productive break from the everyday demands of the job. "If you don't get out, your students, your staff, and your constituents demand every moment of your

time. You have to force yourself to get out and reflect on what you're doing." Collaborative relationships extended beyond group meetings. Some principals talked about their group members as personal friends who are always available for personal or professional support. One principal said friendship was the primary reason for collaboration with others. "I think it is the camaraderie and talking with other people."

Field-based Learning

Respondents perceived field-based experiences as valuable to their professional growth. Descriptions of field-based learning included on-the-job-training and school visitations. On-the-job training was reported from three different perspectives. The first was described as day-to-day learning by first-hand job experience. Some principals described the observation of teachers and students as the most important part of their on-the-job learning. "I just watch what is going on and I learn what is working and what is not. Before I worked in a middle school I didn't understand how these kids were different from high school students. After you are around them, you see what works." Some principals said their teachers helped them learn about middle school concepts. Principals who took jobs in middle schools with well-established effective practices explained how their conversations and observation of effective teachers helped them with professional growth. "When I came to the middle school, I didn't know much about the philosophy or practice. The staff was way ahead of me. I watched them. I talked to them. Now, I feel I have a handle on working in a middle school."

One principal explained the benefits of on-the-job training while pursing an administrative degree. This person had been hired as an assistant principal prior to the completion of a degree or certification in administration. This respondent felt the experience of taking coursework during employment as an administrator enhanced the learning process.

> Without a doubt, I think one of the biggest benefits for me was that when I was pursuing my degree in administration, I was already in the position. When I was given the assistant middle school position, I went straight from the classroom to the office. When I went back to the classroom, I had first hand knowledge for discussion.

Another principal said the graduate program for administrative training was above par. This principal went on to say," I think my graduate program was better than most because we had small classes and therefore lots of interaction. And secondly, we did a lot of field work. We actually went out into the schools and talked and worked with people on the job. I think that is unusual for programs. "

Principals also described on-the-job learning as an experiment with theory and reality. For example, one principal felt (s)he learned about middle school students from teaching in a junior high. When (s)he took an administrative position in a middle school, (s)he believed some changes needed to be made in teaching methods. It took experimentation, however, to develop strategies which worked most effectively. This principal said, "That was 13 years ago and I'm still experimenting with new things. You never stop

learning. You have to keep trying new things to know what will work." Working as an assistant principal provided a good on-the-job experience for another respondent. This principal said it was very beneficial to work with a principal as an assistant because, "it helped me learn the realities of the job. We had a large staff and a lot of students. The principal I worked under showed me how to deal with the reality, not just theory."

The third form of on-the-job training reported by respondents could be described as mentoring. Although only one principal used the term mentor, most respondents described involvement with one or more experienced individuals in terms commonly associated with mentorships. They described an ongoing learning process based on a relationship with an individual whom they trusted and respected. For example, one principal said:

> You talk about quality of learning, my superintendent is the best. I should pay the superintendent that I have now for his teachings. I should still be paying him because I am still learning from him. It's like I learn more every year. And that's scary because I didn't know I was in need of learning so much. He just throws out concepts and I get excited. He knows so much. And he knows how to help me learn. He doesn't ever put me down, but he sure does challenge me. He does that with our administrative team too. We love it. When he gives us new information it's like a pack of dogs fighting over a bone. He helps us get to our philosophy and how we feel about things, and then we leave and all feeling good about things.

On site visitations to middle schools outside the district was another form of field-based learning described by many respondents. Visitations were used for principals' own development as well as for their staff members. Most respondents felt school visitation was one of the most effective ways for educating themselves and their staff members about middle school concepts. Several explained that teachers seem to trust other teachers more than anyone else. Therefore, school visitations helped teachers learn about middle school practices in an environment which was visual, practical, and comfortable. One principal said, "People in other districts can be a good influential. If I go 50 miles from here, I'm an expert, but around here, I'm just a principal, so I take my teachers to other districts and other principals send teachers to my district." Many principals felt school visitations were very cost effective. In contrast to conventions and expensive speakers, visitations only require transportation costs. An added benefit, according to several principals, was the social relations which develop during a school visitation.

In summary, for the purpose of clarity for the reader, the principals' responses to the first question were organized according to five broad areas of professional growth experiences described in this chapter. Principals conveyed effective professional growth activities as those which were tailored to meet their own district needs and directly involved the learner. Self-assessment and goal setting provided principals with a means for determining appropriate activities. They emphasized the importance of talking with others about middle school issues. They spoke positively about meetings in which the agenda was

determined by participants and activities which involved the learner with first-hand experiences. They spoke negatively about activities conducted by direct instruction with no interaction of participants.

Conditions Which Impact Professional Growth Opportunities

The second research question of the study was, "What are the primary conditions which impact your opportunities to participate in professional development activities?" Responses to this question were organized around four themes. First, principals explained how others influenced their experiences. Second, principals described factors of change, including the dynamics of the process, especially as it relates to building personnel. Third, principals described the influences of their own leadership role. Finally, principals talked about their future professional growth concerns. These conditions are summarized in Figure 2.

Other People

Principals talked about others who influenced their growth positively and negatively. On the positive side, principals related stories about superintendents, board members, administrative team members, and family members who had been supportive and encouraging. Support from superintendents and board members came in the form of monetary contributions for professional membership dues, conference expenses, resources for the building, technical support, and personal encouragement. Administrative teams helped provide motivation and a sense of direction. On the other hand, growth was negatively impacted by these same factors. Examples

were given of cases when board members, superintendents, and administrative teams presented obstacles to growth by resisting any change of the status quo. The respondents also said that growth was inhibited by taking time to educate new members in these groups. " It seems like I just get the board members to the point of understanding what we need to do and then we have to start over with a new group."

Figure 2

Conditions Impacting Opportunities for Professional Growth

Other People	Change Factors
Superintendents	Dynamics of Change
Administrative Teams	New Staff /Involuntary Transfers
Board Members	Reorganization of District Grade Levels
Family	
Leadership Role	**Future Concerns**
Visionary Leadership	Maintaining Effectiveness
Shared Decision-making	Impact of Societal Changes
Team Building	
Personal Beliefs and Attitudes	

On the positive side, superintendents served as role models and

supportive colleagues. As role models superintendents were active in professional organizations, attended conferences, led study groups, and shared information about their professional readings. They talked with principals about their own development and encouraged principals and teachers to engage in professional development activities. "My superintendent is such a good educator, we all look to him as a role model. He's always a few steps ahead of us. He reads a lot and thinks a lot. It's really good for the other principals and myself." As colleagues, superintendents were described as friends, supporters, and mentors. A principal in a small district talked about spending time with the superintendent playing basketball before school. This setting was viewed as a positive, productive time to talk about technical and personal concerns. In other districts superintendents assisted with day-to-day concerns. Some principals viewed the superintendent as someone to discuss problems and help examine difficult issues. "My superintendent is always available to help me with issues that need sorting out. Sometimes he just listens. Other times he gives me insight." One principal said he didn't know what he would do when his superintendent retired. This principal felt the superintendent had primary responsibility for his success. This superintendent had provided both technical and emotional support. Superintendents also provided positive leadership for the district.

> Our superintendent is viewed as a strong leader. He organizes plans for district-wide professional development and promotes the importance of life-long learning to all stakeholders. Our district is

recognized for exemplary staff development programs. If we didn't have a strong leader, we would have problems because staff development is expensive in terms of time and money.

In some situations superintendents were less supportive. Superintendents in a few districts were not supportive of efforts to educate principals and staff about middle school practices. According to several principals, superintendents who lacked knowledge of effective middle school practices impeded progress. In these situations principals spent time discussing issues relating to middle school education in order to develop support for professional growth activities. An example was given by a principal who worked to change a junior high into a middle school. This principal had dedicated a substantial amount of time and effort to educate a superintendent about the needs of middle school students. After several years and minimal progress, the superintendent moved to a new district. When a new superintendent arrived, the principal realized he was not familiar with middle school concepts and the process of educating had to begin again.

District administrative teams were most often considered a positive influence. In some cases, principals relied on administrative teams for their personal and technical support. In these roles, team members were principals' primary source of professional collaboration. For example, one principal said, "I really don't have to go out of our district for help. The administrators help each other with technical support. We also provide support for each other when there are problems to deal with. We work very well together." In a few cases team

members were good friends. One principal described a fellow administrator as his best friend. This principal worked with the "friend" for many years. Each of them had held several different positions in the same district over a period of years. This principal felt the friendship positively impact his success and growth.

District administrative teams were reported as obstacles in two districts. In reference to a district administrative team, one principal said,

> We worked well together and things went pretty well for us. As I learned more about the need to change things in the middle school, the others got nervous. They were skeptical of the things I wanted to do and put pressure on me to stay the same. This made it really hard for me to promote programs and growth.

In a similar situation a principal explained how the administrative team focused on district concerns without consideration of unique middle school needs. In this case the principal felt the high school and elementary school principals were content with their programs and practices. In contrast, this principal wanted to promote changes that s/he had learned. As a team, the administrators continually reminded this principal that focus should be on general district goals rather than the individual needs of the middle school.

Board members were occasionally seen as supportive through their role as a public advocate of positive school change. As active members of community organizations and business networks, board members promoted the success of middle school programs and provided assistance in programs which promote an understanding of middle school practices. In one district the

principal said the board members were like assistants who were always taking advantage of opportunities to talk about the school and it's achievements. In another district a board member prompted the principal's initial investigation of middle school practices. This board member had a child in junior high. (S)he had read about the success of middle schools and spoke to the principal about the possibility of investigating what other schools were doing. The principal's response was, "Now, ..., I have my hands full already. I have a lot of students and teachers to deal with. We have some problems that need to be taken care of. We don't need any new ideas. We just need to keep the lid on and get these kids to work." The board member persisted by offering to fly the principal to other states for on-site visitations. The principal accepted and began to learn about middle school practices. This led to the transformation from a junior high to a middle school.

In several instances, however, when principals spoke of board members they took on a more negative tone. This negative tone centered around lack of understanding of middle school programs and the importance of professional growth. Several principals explained difficulties in developing support for middle school programs and described how board members resisted allocation of time and money needed for professional growth for principals and teachers. Consequently, some principals continually worked to educate board members about the importance of professional development needed for teachers to learn about effective middle school practices.

I have had to work so hard to keep board members educated on

> middle school concepts. It seems like every time I feel I am making headway, new board members are elected and I have to start all over again. Most board members think the middle school should be just like the high school. They also believe teachers should know how to teach in the middle school when they are hired. So I have to convince them that most training programs don't focus on middle level education.

Principals also explained the difficulty of getting time for board members to learn about the middle school. Board meetings have long agendas which limit the time for education by principals.

Many of the principals talked about the influence of their family on their professional development. In many situations principals felt they would not have been able to grow and be successful if they had not had support and encouragement from their spouse and family. Family support was described in terms of patience and understanding. In many cases principals felt positive growth was influenced by hours of work outside of school which meant time away from their families. These hours were used to meet with colleagues, staff members, and others. In order to do this they needed a supportive family. During an interview one principal said, "It's like today. I told my wife I was going to be late because I needed to meet with you. I wanted to do this because I thought it would be valuable for me. My wife was supportive. That has been important for me."

Change Factors

Principals talked about how staff members dealt with change. The

dynamics of change, according to some, is an ever-present condition which must be factored into planning. References to change were interwoven throughout all of the interviews. Respondents described problems related to change and emphasized the necessity for understanding change as a gradual process.

> In order to move your building from a junior high to a middle school you have to deal with people and change. In fact, understanding change and how it influences people is just as important as learning the concepts related to middle schools. We talk about making changes in our curriculum and everyone seems to agree they need to make adjustments so that more students are successful, but everyone seems to think that someone else should do the changing. People are really resistant to change. These are people who went through school as successful students. They were successful in high school and they were successful in college. And most have been successful teachers. When you talk with them about changing their curriculum or practices, it's like telling them they have been wrong all these years. That is very difficult for people.

Some principals felt understanding the change process was a critical factor in facilitating professional development for middle schools. According to some respondents, middle level education can't be successful if staff members aren't willing to make continual changes. "You never have an ideal situation. You are always going through change. And change is really the issue. You don't arrive at a middle school. You don't arrive at your learning about middle

school . . . or anything. It's a continual process." Another principal talked about recognition as a middle school which was received from a state organization. As this principal went on, s/he talked about concern for the future. "Sure, we have been recognized as a good middle school, but we aren't done growing. We have to realize that continual change is part of being a good middle school. We can't just sit back and stagnate. We have to keep growing."

The issue of change is especially important to middle schools because traditional junior high practices, according to most respondents, are so different from effective practices in middle schools. "Effective educational practices for adolescents center around meeting the needs of students. Junior highs centered around traditional curriculum. The two are very different." One principal said,

> We are in an excellent position to make changes, but we have to realize we just aren't there. Most of what we have done just gets us ready for change. I will say we have changed when we put the needs of students first and the needs of the system second. This just isn't happening.

Another said, "Everyone talks about being student-centered. It gets a lot of lip service. But do you know anyone who puts the student before the curriculum? We just haven't accomplished this. People are too resistant to change. We aren't willing to give up traditional curriculum and practices."

Change in personnel was an area cited as an obstacle to growth. As new staff members, time was needed with others for the development of positive

relationships and trust. In addition to the time needed for the establishment of personal concerns, new staff members needed time to dialogue about educational beliefs and values. Establishment of these elements was explained as a pre-requisite to growth as a unit. In large districts principals anticipated yearly addition of new staff members and therefore developed strategies for orientation of new teachers. " We are growing so rapidly that I have to plan for a crop of new teachers each year. In fact, I just met with my new teachers. I always plan activities for them, but it's never enough to catch them up." Another principal who also was dealing with rapid growth said, "The addition of new teachers demands that we form new relationships each year. I have to be continually focused on developing shared vision and encouraging relationships. No matter how much I do, we are never all on the same plane of thinking."

Personnel changes included involuntary transfers from other buildings within the district. Involuntary transfers forced high school teachers to teach middle school courses. This type of transfer reportedly created tension and discontentment among teachers. One principal explained how transfers presented obstacles. S/he said:

> The high school teachers were resistant to the adoption of middle school practices. They wanted to teach the same way they had been teaching in high school. The middle school staff made them feel like their practices were wrong. There were misunderstandings and confusion. For awhile, I didn't think the high school teachers would ever get along. After two or

> three years of debating issues and working together, they finally began to mesh. I guess some never did adjust. They left the middle school when they could get a transfer. The ones that stayed are comfortable now and love the middle school.

Re-organization of grade levels among buildings in the district created a similar type of obstacle. Integration of teachers and students from a different grade level required re-thinking and shifts in management practices. Principals that acquired supervision of additional staff members felt they could not maintain personal relationships with their new staff. In addition, compromises were sometimes necessary to accommodate the needs of a larger staff or more diverse staff.

Influence of Leadership Role

Respondents explained how their personal leadership roles influenced professional growth. They described authentic stories related to their experiences. Collectively, they served in facilitative leadership roles. As they talked about professional growth experiences they described visionary leadership, shared decision-making, and team building as leadership skills used to promote professional growth. Principals also talked about the influence of their own attitude toward professional growth.

Visionary leadership

As principals talked about their professional growth and development, they conveyed a sense of urgency related to their role as a leader with vision. Visionary leadership was portrayed as a critical element for leading middle

schools. "Your staff has to have confidence in you. They are always looking to you for leadership. If you're going to keep their respect you had better know where you are going. You can't do that if you don't know what the leaders in middle school are saying."

Principals explained how professional growth activities contributed to their role as a visionary leader. Exposure to new ideas through professional growth helped principals develop vision in the early years as a principal and helped them refine and readjust their vision as their schools reached goals. In the first one to three years as a middle school principal, many respondents felt they had no vision.

> I worked as a middle school principal two years before I realized that I was only a manager. When I joined a professional organization, I began to see others with vision and goals. If I wouldn't have gone out of my building, I might not have learned how to develop a vision for leading the staff.

Most of the principals felt that creating vision is an ongoing activity. "The process of creating vision for the staff is ongoing. You have to be continually reading, talking, and learning about middle school concepts in order to provide leadership for growth."

In several cases visionary leadership was described as a tool for guiding implementation of middle school practices. " Our vision helps us know how we are doing. Every year we talk about our vision statement and reflect on what we're doing. This helps get focused on what we're doing." Principals explained

a variety of methods for conveying vision to staff members. Staff meetings, distribution of printed literature, and study groups served as preliminary measures to goal-setting. "Shared vision is the common factor we have when we set goals. It helps me get the staff motivated. When we talk about our vision, they get excited about learning ways to make the vision work." In another setting a principal said, "Shared vision keeps us all going in the same direction. When teachers go to workshops and gets excited, they analyze how new concepts fit into our vision. It keeps us from going off in different directions." In this case some staff members became eager to adopt major changes while attending without considering the vision. "They were enthusiastic to jump into change without considering the total picture. When I stepped in and reminded them of our vision they slowed the process down in order to keep the staff together. " A principal in a large district said the common vision allowed grade level teams to set goals independent of other teams. "Our staff is so large that the teams can't all be doing the same thing. However, we see a common vision of serving the needs of adolescents and we can fit everything together."

Shared Decision-making

There was a pervasive feeling that professional growth proceeds most effectively when staff members share in the decision-making process.

> Everyone has to be involved. It's not just me. I don't think I'm moving ahead unless everyone is with me. It doesn't do me any good to go out and learn about great things if my staff doesn't have the same information. We have to decide together what we are going to do. It's not

like the old days when principals told staff members what to do and they would accept the decision.

Principals explained how shared decision-making influenced planning strategies for their professional growth. "I used to learn about a concept and then teach it to my staff members. I finally learned that it was more effective to decide as a team what we needed to learn. Now we decide together and bring an outside source to the building so we could all have the same experience." Others said they initiated study teams to learn new concepts together. Study teams provided an opportunity for the principal and staff members to dialogue about ideas as they were introduced. "Our study groups work well for me. It helps me know how they feel about new ideas. This saves time in the long run. I know when we are ready to move on. I also know when an idea is not going to be accepted. I don't waste time learning about things that they won't accept."

Setting goals for the building was explained as part of the shared decision-making process. Several principals involved staff members in an annual goal-setting process. In some cases other stakeholders were involved in the process. One principal's story conveyed how shared decision-making was used for goal-setting.

> Goal setting to me is a cooperative thing with all stakeholders. One of the best days of every year is our goal setting session with the staff. We bring in student input, parent input. We sit down in a room, shut the doors and say, "Okay, we're going to pound out what we felt was good about this year, we're going to pound out some goals for our kids and our school for

next year." Every single employee must bring a goal for next year. . . . They have a chance to bring it to the floor, defend it. Immediate feedback. Then we get a staff consensus. Is this something we want to pursue? If it is, then we pursue it and it's put down as a goal for next year. So not only do my goals get incorporated into the building, but staff goals. We can give our teachers credit for the ideas. . . . To me that's a part of my growth, to just sit and listen to the people share what they can do to make school a better place.

Team Building

Team building was described as a strategy for encouraging professional growth. Principals emphasized the need to treat all staff members as equal members of a building team. The essence of team building concepts was captured as one principal described the experience of being nominated for principal of the year. (S)he said it was a real honor to receive such recognition, however, (s) he had to write a letter to decline the recognition because (s)he felt it was not appropriate to take the credit for success. This principal explained that the staff was just as important in success and recognition should not be given to one person. (S)he told the staff that no single person should be singled out as more important than any other.

Joint planning time was described as a strategy for building strong teams. Joint planning time was defined as a time for grade level teachers to plan together. In most cases this was one period per day. In a few settings two periods per day were designated as joint planning time. In larger districts, joint

planning time for teachers did not include all grade level teachers, but did include common planning time for a group of teachers who were considered to be a team. Joint planning time was initiated, in most cases, for the purpose of discussing educational strategies for shared students. Over time, the shared planning time became an effective means for building unity and support of team members. "The teamwork is so important. Before they had joint planning times, no one really used others as support. Now the teams are very independent and have a good sense of self-efficacy because they make decisions about what they are doing."

The joint planning time became more important for team building over time.

> When we started the team planning, we did it two days a week. After a short time they were saying, 'We need more time.' We get a lot from sharing. The interaction, the reading, and the time together are important for team building. We just don't get enough time in our jobs to sit down and be together.

Principals talked about how teams became supportive of each other. "They became very close to each other. Although they still looked to me for leadership, they discovered how valuable it was to work as a team."

Beliefs and Attitudes

Principals' beliefs and attitudes toward professional development and learning was described as a condition which influences professional growth. In all cases, principals conveyed enthusiasm for professional growth. Many

reported enthusiasm as a love for learning. One said, "Learning is the best part of my life. I am a full-time learner. It keeps me going. Learning is the key to my enthusiasm and success." One principal described commitment to professional development as a primary element of job responsibility.

> My job is really just removing roadblocks for people. Knowledge can be one of the greatest roadblocks. You hear about paradigms, well, they are really just limits of your knowledge. Your paradigm never changes unless you learn new things. I'm responsible for doing that. It's a big part of my job.

Principals' attitudes towards problems were presented as a positive motivation for growth. Many principals viewed problems as opportunities for growth. One said, "My assistant gets tired of me saying, 'Here's another opportunity for growth.' He knows I mean I have a problem for him." Another principal explained how resistance in the district promoted learning.

> The people around me just don't understand the needs of adolescents. Parents, school board members, and even other principals didn't seem to believe that middle school kids aren't the same as elementary and high school kids. I forced myself to be an expert on middle level education so I could argue for the needs of kids.

Principals repeatedly pointed out the relationship between their attitude and the attitude of the staff. In general, principals felt that their attitude set the tone for the building. One principal compared building principals to a barometer. (S)he felt teachers followed the lead of the principal. "When the

principal is excited, the teachers are excited. When the principal sits back the teachers do too." Another principal said, "It is important to remember that you're not an island. You are always working with others. If you pursue growth with a positive attitude, it is likely that your staff with follow. If you aren't excited about learning new things, you can't expect them to get excited."

Concerns for the Future

In conjunction with the research questions principals talked about their concerns for their future professional growth and development. One commonality was found among their concerns for the future. This concern was centered around maintaining effectiveness on the job. This was expressed by approximately 75% of the respondents. Other concerns were unique to one or two principals. They are listed in this section.

Most of the principals interviewed for this study were concerned about doing their jobs well. Each of them related experiences about accomplishments which they had achieved. At the same time they were concerned about their ability to remain successful. In reports of this concern, principals described the need for ongoing professional development. One quote which reflected words of several principals was, "I have learned that being effective is something that does not have a final product. Instead, you master one thing and then you have to go on to another. You have to understand that being a middle school isn't something that happens and then you're done. You have to keep moving. It's a process not a product." Another principal explained how ongoing change was a concern for influencing the need for continual professional growth. S/he said,

"The shelf-life of solutions keeps getting shorter and shorter. Just when you think things are going well, you discover it's time to change." This principal compared ongoing change to teaching. Teaching, according to this report, must be different each year to be effective.

The remainder of concerns were expressed by one or two individuals. They included:

1. Maintaining a high energy level - This concern was in relation to the high energy level of students. The principal is actively involved with students. (S)he questioned whether the same energy level could be maintained over a period of years.

2. Keeping up with changes in technology - The principal that expressed this concern shared information about the rapid changes associated with advancements in technology. (S)he felt it was going to be difficult to maintain knowledge and skills related to technology for self, staff, and students. This concern included questions about the district's ability to fund the resources needed to stay current in the field of technology.

3. Development of a global perspective - According to one respondent, the ability to develop a global perspective in education was a concern. This principal explained the importance of education with a global perspective in mind.

4. Maintaining middle school innovations - One principal was concerned about the ability to maintain innovations which had been made in middle school education. (S)he felt the changes were due to staff enthusiasm and energy

level. (S)he was concerned about maintaining momentum that had developed in the building. (S)he felt staff turnover, and financial support threatened the quality of programs that currently existed in the building.

5. Dealing with diversity - According to a couple of principals, dealing with diversity of the student population was becoming increasingly difficult. One principal said,

> My concern is to somehow help us deal with the new population and develop a new mindset about the diversity we have to deal with. We used to be a homogeneous population. That's not true anymore, but none of us want to deal with the diversity. I'm just frustrated with society. I'm afraid our staff is getting discouraged. We have to find ways to deal with the increasing needs of students.

6. Learning how to manage personal time - The principal that expressed this concern explained how demands became increasingly time consuming. (S)he explained, for example, the impact of training students how to recognize and deal with sexual harassment. In this school the training prompted a surge of complaints which each took hours of time. This principal also talked about the many staff development offerings available for administrators and principals. "You know you could spend everyday learning new things. It's difficult to decide priorities and manage your time."

7. Learning to be a facilitative leader - Three principals talked about this concern. In their reports of this concern, they talked about change in leadership and management roles. Each felt authoritarian leadership was no longer

effective. One said, "What I need most is to learn the skill of facilitation. Group facilitation and empowerment of people is critical to our business. If I am going to continue as a leader, I know I'm going to have to get better at facilitation."

8. Maintaining patience - One principal said impatience can get in the way of success. This principal explained how personal desire to adopt changes could be overwhelming to teachers. (S)he said, "If I move too quickly, the teachers tend to shut down. I have to remember that growing is a gradual process. You can't go in and just do it quickly. One thing builds on another and sometimes you have to rebuild."

In summary of the findings from the second research question, four factors influencing professional growth were reported. The first factor, Other People, explained how superintendents, board members, administrative teams, and family influences professional growth of principals. The second factor depicted the influence of change on professional growth. As principals described the process of growth they explained the negative impact of change. According to these reports, nearly all staff members had difficulty dealing with change. In addition, principals talked about the problems associated with new personnel or personnel who had been involuntarily transferred as a major growth obstacle.

The third area dealt with the role of leadership and how principals felt their personal attitude toward growth contributed to the overall professional growth of staff. Finally principals' concerns for their future professional growth were reported. Principals' concerns were diverse. One commonality was found

among the principals' reports. This concern was that of maintaining an excellent middle school. Each principal felt they had achieved some degree of success. Most were concerned about the maintenance of this success. Other concerns dealt with updating technology, developing a global perspective, dealing with student diversity, learning how to manage time, being a facilitative leader, and maintaining patience.

Other Factors Contributing to Effective Leadership

The third research question asked whether there were any other factors that the respondents felt contributed to their ability to provide exemplary leadership in their middle school. The findings from this question are divided into five areas. The readers should be aware that these headings were not clearly defined during the dialogue of the interviews. They are, instead, patterns or themes used to help the reader better understand factors other than professional growth activities which respondents felt influence their leadership ability. A summary of the findings is given in Figure 3.

Commitment to Middle Level

The circumstances surrounding the professional lives of these principals are unique. Prior to their first experience with adolescents, only one of the principals had desired to serve in the middle school. Depending on the individual, their professional training and goals were geared for secondary or elementary education. Most believed middle school students would be unpleasant to work with and difficult to educate. In each case, however, principals developed a sense of commitment to middle level education over

time.

Figure 3

Other Factors Contributing to Effective Leadership

Commitment to Middle Level	Intuitive Knowledge
Belief in MS Concepts	Understanding Student Needs
Campaigning for MS	Understanding of Effective Programming
Preference for Adolescents	
Relationships with Others	Personal Characteristics
Concern for Staff	Motivation
Concern for Students	Risk Taking
Honesty and Sincerity	Enthusiasm

Each principal had a slightly different story to tell about the development of their commitment to middle level education. Some resisted a move to the middle school. One that strongly resisted the idea of working in a middle school first served in an elementary school. When (s)he was informed that (s)he would have to move to a middle school, the response was, "No, way. I would never work in a middle school. I've heard horror stories about those kids. I would have to be crazy to work there. If you think I'm going to the middle school you're wrong. I'm going to get my doctorate and get out of this place." Others were more accepting of their move to a middle school, but no more convinced it would be a good move. Still others accepted positions in middle schools because it was a means for moving up in the system. For example, one principal was working as an associate principal in a high school. (S)he wanted

to remain in the district, but did not want to continue as an associate. A move to the middle school was the only option. Another principal elected to serve in a middle school because it provided an opportunity to open a new building. This principal was charged with the responsibility of everything from overseeing construction to hiring new staff. This principal, like others, had little knowledge of middle school concepts.

Principals developed a sense of commitment to middle level education through their experiences with this age group. Initially, one principal took a job in a junior high in hope of later moving to the high school. As this principal worked with adolescents (s)he discovered work with these students to be very rewarding. When a high school position became available, the desire to serve middle school students was strong.

> By the time I had some seniority in the district, I was so taken by the enthusiasm of the junior high, I didn't want to go to the high school. In fact, I would never have gone into administration if I hadn't developed such a devotion to the students in the junior high.

Another principal served both junior and senior high students as a teacher. This principal said,

> I had senior calculus and college prep math. These kids were bright and I understood how they thought. I also had ninth grade algebra and junior high math, and I began to understand these kids. Before I went into administration, I decided I liked the junior high kids the best. First, I had to work as a high school principal, but my goal was to get back to the junior

high kids.

Principals' commitment to middle level education was conveyed with intensity. In some cases respondents resisted pressure from others to move to a high school. One principal said he had been repeatedly asked to move to the high school. His wife and others couldn't understand why s/he wouldn't want to move "up" to the high school. Two other principals, who had been offered high school positions, said a move to the high school would mean a substantial raise. They explained that while the financial rewards would be greater, the job satisfaction would not be as great as working in the middle school.

Commitment to middle school programs included a willingness to campaign for the needs of the middle school. Several principals explained that middle schools are often considered less important than high schools or elementary schools." Middle schools are sometimes ignored or under rated. I think being a champion for the middle school is a big key of success. In so many districts they just give us what is left over. High school cuts staff, they go to the middle school. I want first choice of top people for my building." Another principal said, "In order to be successful with middle school education you have to fight for those kids, and I always tell the board, there is no more important group of kids in the world. We are their last chance. If we don't provide them with success, they don't have a chance." Another principal said, "The middle school philosophy has captured the essence of what education has been trying to do for years. In time, all levels of education will catch on to the philosophy we have."

The firm connection between principals and middle schools included descriptions of unique characteristics of adolescents, and those that choose to work in middle schools. The characteristics of adolescents, according to the respondents are eminently present, yet discernibly difficult to describe. Many principals referred to these peculiarities with humor and affection. "I don't know why I like the middle school. I just do. I'm crazy and so are they (students). I guess I understand them and they understand me." Another said, "I like the middle school student. You have to like them to be successful. Middle school is different. The teachers are unique. They're energetic. They have a sense of humor and a sense of fun. Middle school is the best of all the grade levels." None of the descriptions captured the essence of their message better than one who said,

> I started my career as a high school business education teacher . . . I worked as a high school associate principal for eleven years . . . I didn't and wouldn't have chosen to be in a middle school. I never wanted to be in a middle school. The kids are strange. They are goofy. They are up. The are down. They are so unstable. They are emotional. . . . And that's why I choose to be here now.

Principals explained the importance of middle level education in relation to adolescent growth and development. Success in high school, according to most respondents, is contingent upon successful experiences in the middle school. Principals described students as impressionable, with fragile self-esteem. They explained the importance of promoting a climate which nurtures

adolescents and allows them to experience success. One principal said,

> I don't like elementary students because you still have to buckle their overshoes and wipe their noses. High school students are too rigid. Their lives are pretty fixed. But middle school students you can change. You can influence them. They wear everything on their sleeves. You have to be positive with them and encourage them. I wanted to be part of that.

Another principal said,

> By the time they get to high school, they're pretty well set. When middle school teachers and middle school kids know that you're fighting for them, they really respond. I enjoy doing that. I had no idea how I would enjoy this. There is no comparison to my job as a middle school principal and my job as a K-12 principal.

One principal talked about commitment in terms of a vision for middle school. In his words, "I want every child to beat down the door to get into this place. Middle schools have to be places where students feel safe and successful. If they feel successful, they won't want to go home for vacation. (S)he pointed out that there was a girl in the building at the time of the interview (during a school vacation) who had open enrolled from another school. This student came to the building during the school break and said she didn't like vacations. She wanted school to start again. The principal said, "That's what education is all about. I want all students to love school like that girl.

Intuitive Knowledge

It would seem logical to assume that principals learn knowledge and

skills to lead schools through administrative training programs. In contrast, several principals referred to their intuitive knowledge as a means of providing leadership and making decisions. During an interview the researcher attempted to clarify what seemed to be intutive knowledge. The researcher said, "I'm trying to separate your personality from your training. You seem be saying that you 'sense' what is going on around you. Can you help me sort out this sense from your training?" The response was:

> That's very hard because my sense has always been there. Ever since I was in elementary school the teacher would leave me in charge of classrooms. I was always the one the teacher would leave on the sub plans as the person who could help out. When the teacher got called to the office, I was always asked to watch the classroom. And, you know, sometimes that was a very long time. I think those teachers must have been taking coffee breaks. You know, I think they took advantage of me. But that has always been true. When I went to college I was just waiting out the time until I could get out and teach. So I have never known a time when I didn't want to teach or didn't know how to teach.

Principals related their sense of intuition in other ways. Four principals said they seemed to know what kids needed, but needed support to convey their beliefs to others. These said professional journals were a good source for finding documentation of good teaching strategies. In one case a principal explained, "When I want the staff to work on an educational strategy, I skim articles to find support for the strategy. I use this information as a tool for

communicating the need for the strategy." Another principal searched for schools which supported the intuitive belief and then sent teachers to visit the schools. This principal said, "When you see practices that address what you know about your students, it only seems logical to try and bring about those practices you know will work." In an effort to understand one of the principals, the researcher asked why s/he had adopted a middle school philosophy instead of a junior high philosophy. This principal said,

> The middle school philosophy matched my instincts and experiences. And it matched kids needs. If we don't use the practices which meet these kids needs, we create discipline problems. I guess I like the philosophy because it helps me avoid a lot of problems.

A third principal felt (s)he knew about appropriate strategies for teaching middle level students long before (s)he had any formal training in middle school philosophy. When this principal began a study program with one of the few Iowa professors specializing in middle school education, (s)he began to match his own knowledge of adolescents with that of the professor. (S)he said they didn't always agree with each other.

> I used to argue with the professor about what a middle school should be. He always said that a junior high was an extension of the high school going down and that a middle school was an extension of the elementary going up. But I disagreed. I believed middle school was a entity of itself. Because in middle school you have a student who thinks and acts like tenth graders one day and the next day he's more like a third grader.

> Middle school requires a truly unique type of educational practice. . . . Now he (the professor) agrees with me.

This principal also said,

> Formal training in middle level education was interesting, but didn't really teach me much information that I didn't already know. I did learn, however, that the original junior highs were created with the same belief system as middle schools now have. I guess the originators of junior highs had the right ideas, but, as most people in education know, something went wrong and junior highs turned into mini-high schools.

Relationships with Others

Positive relationships with others was expressed as an important element of success. Principals talked about their relationships with students and staff. Good relationships were described in terms of showing respect, listening, fairness, kindness, teamwork, and honesty. In general, principals conveyed their use of an open door policy with a willingness to make time for the concerns of others.

Principals talked about the importance of developing good relationships with students. They explained the necessity of being sincere and honest with adolescents.

> You can't put on a front and expect to get by with this age. These kids are so perceptive and so sensitive. I think these kids, more than any other age, are 'bull detectors'. They know if you are interested in them or if

you're just putting on a front.

Another principal expressed similar thoughts.

> You really have to be genuine, or you can't make it in the middle school. They (students) know if your genuine, and they respond. It's a great place to have a birthday. They all want in on the celebration. And they know when you are down, too. Sometimes the students know before your staff knows.

Principals talked about their love of middle school students as a factor. "I like the students. The hallways are fun for me. I go out in-between classes just to talk to the students and watch them." In another district the principal said, "I love them and they know that. It's that old saying, 'I have to know that you care, before I care what you know.' I think the kids respond to me because they know I sincerely care about them."

Positive relationships with staff members and among staff members was also explained. Honesty and praise were discussed as a means to promote good relationships.

> The simple fact is, you have to be very honest and positive with people. You have to tell them when they are doing a good job. I tell them that I will beat the drum for them because they are outstanding. If I have a concern about their work, I don't get abrasive. I'm very straightforward and respectful of each individual.

In discussion of good relationships another principal talked about individual style. "I don't really come off as a warm person. But I do convey the importance

of honesty and sincerity. This is important. I like people and they know that." One principal talked about the interaction between collegiality and the teacher improvement process. This principal said, "If I go in their rooms without a somewhat adversarial relation and focus on improving curriculum, my efforts are more productive. It's difficult to convince board members of this because they are so focused on accountability."

In addition to emphasizing the importance of their relationships with others, principals expressed the process of identifying human relation skills in their hiring practices. One principal said s/he always tells new staff members that they were hired for their personal attributes--flexibility and caring, not because they had a 3.5 GPA. (S)he explained that, "A high GPA may show responsibility and good work ethic, but it doesn't show anything about compassion for children, and I think that's true of administrators. They have to have compassion for people to be effective administrators." One principal talked about the necessity of hiring a mix of personalities. "You can't have people that are all alike. I look for people that can work well together and still express their individuality." Several principals preferred to hire teachers with elementary training rather than secondary training. Elementary teachers, according to respondents, are more geared to the caring atmosphere of the middle school. In one district a principal talked about hiring kindergarten teachers.

> When I came to the junior high, I realized these people were like college professors. They just went to class and taught. They didn't get involved with students. So I hired a couple of kindergarten teachers. These

> teachers knew how to take care of kids. They were like mothers to the kids. That's what we needed in middle school.

Although good relationships with others was conveyed as very important, principals did not see relationships as paramount to high performance. Good relationships were not described as agreement with everyone or everything. The following example represents this impression.

> I've been an administrator because I care about people. The staff affect or morale is important. But you can't keep persons in schools if they aren't functioning and meeting students needs. I say, "You're a professional. We will take care of you. You act like a professional, you're treated like a professional." That's a key . . . I'm very concerned about them but I would not be considered a warm-fuzzy person. That would not be my style. . . . We have always found a way to accommodate staff needs. I think that's what we're all about. However, I have also fired a teacher every year.

Personal Characteristics

In general terms the respondents projected a high level of motivation for excellent job performance. They told about working long hours to achieve goals set by themselves and by their schools. Some said they were motivated by fear of not being good at their job or fear of failure. One described motivation in terms of nervousness and wanted to be very prepared. One principal said that pressure was a motivating factor.

> I've always thrived on pressure my whole life. When I was an athlete they

> gave me the tough spots. I've always thrived on that and I'm one of those people who says they do their best work under pressure. I probably handle pressure better than a lot of people. So I really work hard. It's not because people have come in and pointed their finger at me, it's because I've wanted to make myself work hard.

Many of the principals were risk takers. Some of them talked about risk-taking as a part of their leadership behavior. For example, one principal said, "I'm a risk taker. You can't wait for change to happen. You must create change." Another principal said,

> Administration is risk taking. We're talking about it to our teachers all the time that we need to get into a change-mode and a risk-taking mode. Sometimes it's good to have some pitfalls. Staff members, administration, kids, you all have to know how to get knocked down and get up. That's okay.

Risk-taking was also revealed in stories. One principal communicated his tolerance for risk-taking in a story about giving up a job and searching for a new one. In this story, the principal said he was employed as a middle school principal and was content with the position.

> "I was there for 12 years and I loved it there. But one night I was listening to the board discuss the financial problems of the district. I realized that if the administrative staff was reduced, the district would save on expenditures. I decided I would resign and suggest they combine to have another principal cover my duties. So I did and then I

began interviewing. I was asked to return for a second interview in one districts. I had three children in school at the time and knew I must have a job to support them. However, instead of consenting to the second interview, I told them I would have to think about it; look around the community; and then let them know if I wanted to continue with the i interview process.

Many of the principals said they love education and love to talk about education. After saying, "I feel strongly about this," several times, one principal said I could just put that (I feel strongly) in front of everything (s)he said. This principal went on to say that (s)he just feels passionate about education because it is the backbone of the country. With firm conviction the principal said, "Educators are the key to the success of the nation." Another referred to her/himself as a "zealot" for education.

In an attempt to understand the enthusiasm the researcher questioned respondents about their apparent excitement. Most could not explain why they were so enthusiastic about middle school and education. Some said they just enjoy life and middle school is part of that. In an attempt to explain, one principal said it's just a spark. That principal explained quality should be evident in the staff also. In explanation, (s)he told about a conversation with a teacher.

I said to a young teacher just this week. 'I don't know how to explain this to you, but I would like to see that spark in you that says you love what you're doing. I know its difficult to be a first year teacher, and the demands that we put on you. There isn't anything I can say to you that is

a major concern, but what I'm looking for from you is that spark that says you enjoy being here everyday with these kids.'

A principal who had been in a middle school for 14 years conveyed warmth for the middle school by saying, "You know when everything has gone well. It's kind of golden. . . . And you know you've had a good year because you have had a lot of those days. . . . I just feel very positive and very good. I also feel sad because I'm getting older and I will have to retire.

The findings in this section were organized into five broad themes. The first, Commitment to Middle School, centered around evidence of principals' dedication to middle level education and adolescents. The second theme, Intuitive Knowledge, described principals' accounts of decision-making and leadership based on what appeared to be their intuition. In the third theme, Relationships with Others, principals explained the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with students and staff and referred to the need for being honest and sincere with both of these groups.

Finally, the fourth theme dealt with principals personal characteristics and desire for success. According to the respondents, success is the middle school requires the commitment of long hours and the willingness to take risks, to tolerate stress and be enthusiastic about education.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the professional growth experiences of fifteen exemplary middle school principals in Iowa. Three broad research questions guided the investigation. They were: (a) What professional growth experiences effectively contribute to the development of exemplary middle school principals? (b) What are the primary conditions which impact middle school principals' opportunities to participate in these activities? (c) Are there factors other than the activities described which contribute to a principal's ability to be an effective middle school leader? These questions, derived from current literature and research regarding professional growth and development of school leaders, guided the data collection and analysis process. This chapter discusses the findings, offers conclusions, and suggests possible implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future study.

Discussion

For purposes of clarity this discussion is organized around three broad areas which correspond to the research questions. They are: (a) Professional Growth Experiences, (b) Conditions Impacting Professional Growth, and (c) Other Factors Contributing to Effective Leadership.

Professional Growth Experiences

The descriptions of professional growth experiences reported by exemplary middle school principals have been organized under the

professional growth headings reviewed in Chapter II. The first is self-assessment and goal setting. The importance of self-assessment and goal setting is reported in literature as a tool for planning and directing professional growth activities for school leaders (Barth, 1993; Carter & Harris, 1991; Lee, 1993). Principals in this study reported the use of self-assessment and goal setting in their personal descriptions of professional growth experiences. The principals felt self-assessment and goal setting helped them develop planned growth activities which increased their job effectiveness. Most commonly, they talked about self-assessment and goal setting as an informal process that was self-initiated and self-monitored. They most often referred to self-assessment and goal setting as a reflective thinking process integrated into their day-to-day routines stimulated during collaboration with others, reading, attending meetings, and other activities. A few principals used a formal written process to set goals.

Principals said they preferred to participate in professional growth activities which provided an opportunity for their input. They spoke positively about (a) working with experienced administrators, (b) meetings with the agenda determined by participants, and (c) self-directed experimentation. They spoke negatively about activities conducted by direct instruction with no interaction of participants. This corresponds to the research that discourages didactic instruction, citing that principals must be involved in shaping their experiences in order to provide effective growth (Asayesh, 1993; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980). Principals in the study were somewhat critical of coursework

and professional meetings that did not provide an opportunity to tailor the experience in order to be more efficient with the use of their time.

Acquisition of a knowledge base about middle school concepts and practices was part of each respondent's professional growth and development. Various means for acquiring this knowledge base were described by the respondents. Reading was the most frequently cited source for developing knowledge. Study groups, university coursework, professional organizations, conventions, and other meetings were also reported as sources for acquiring new information. Principals talked about acquiring knowledge in both formal and informal settings. Informal settings were preferred by most principals because of the practical nature of information gained in these settings. They also reported informal interaction as a time efficient means of gaining information. In contrast, some principals reported formal settings, such as university coursework and conventions, as a effective means to gain exposure to new information. The practice of acquiring basic knowledge about the field is frequently found in educational researchers' recommendations (Hoyle, 1985; Thomson, 1993). Organizations designed to assist educational administrators have also actively promoted development of knowledge base through publications and workshops (AASA, 1982; NAESP, 1991; Thomson, 1993).

Respondents referred to collaboration with others as an important source for professional growth and development. This practice, sometimes called networking, has been reported as a means for "support, counsel, and nurturance" (Thoms, 1987, p. 10). Collaboration is not promoted as a complex

or complicated process. It is a matter of spending time with other professionals (Erlandson, 1994). In this study, principals reported trust and respect for others as key factors of effective collaboration. Collaboration with others was referred to in nearly all aspects of professional growth. This included telephone calls, informal meetings, and formal meetings. The most frequently reported form of collaboration was small, informal groups. Technical assistance and emotional support were conveyed as important reasons for collaboration with others. This reported practice parallels the philosophy practiced by principal centers across the nation which use collaboration with others to facilitate learning opportunities (Asayesh, 1993).

Respondents perceived field-based experiences as valuable to their professional growth. Descriptions of field-based experiences included on-the-job-training and school visitations. Descriptions of on-the-job training included: (a) knowledge and skill acquisition through observation, (b) experimentation with theory and reality, and (c) discussion with others. Two principals explained the benefits of on-the-job training while pursing an administrative degree. School visitations were used for principals' own development as well as for their staff members. According to research, the desire for field-based learning is supported for several reasons. Hallinger and Greenblatt (1987) for example, believe this desire may be related to less than satisfactory experiences associated with theory-based training. Criticism of theory-based programs has centered around the gap between theory and the application of knowledge and skills needed for effective day-to-day performance. Literature advocating field-

based experiences focus on the need to increase skill competency (Asayesh, 1993). Avenues for experiencing field-based learning have become common practice in principal centers and leadership academies across the nation (Greier & Draughon, 1987; Rothberg & Pawlas, 1993). Lee (1993), believes that one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate new leadership is to engage the participant in a first-hand experience. He builds on the support of research which concludes leadership as a contextual skill (Goodlad, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Conditions Which Impact Professional Growth Opportunities

The conditions impacting professional growth, as reported by the principals in this study, are grouped into three primary areas. They included: (a) Influences of Others, (b) Influence of Change, and (c) Leadership. The findings under the heading, Influences from Others, centered around circumstances within school districts which impacted principals' opportunity to participate in professional growth experiences. The respondents told stories of positive influences relating to their superintendents, administrative team members, board members, and family members. In some cases superintendents served as role models and supportive colleagues. Administrative team members also served as supportive colleagues. In some situations these two groups were considered friends, based on the technical and emotional support provided.

Principals also reported cases in which superintendents, board members, and some administrative team members, were obstacles to growth. In these cases principals told about their struggle to work with district leaders

carrying mindsets which were counter productive to professional development efforts. In an interview with Roland Barth, Sparks (1993) described mindsets of district leaders which have negative impact on professional development efforts of administrators. According to Barth some district leaders believe principals should not need professional growth beyond their pre-service training, and, consequently, are negative towards expenditures supporting professional development. In addition, Barth talked about the impediments resulting from the belief that financial resources of the district should go directly to programs for the students rather than professional development.

The second condition impacting professional development was change. As principals talked about professional development efforts in their schools they described many of the problems cited in research related to the dynamics of change (Fullan, 1982; Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). The dynamics of change which influenced the growth of principals and their staff focused around staff members who were not interested in participating in activities related to learning new teaching strategies or programs. In general, principals felt resistance to change retarded the growth process of the building. As reported in the findings, principals felt their own professional growth was closely related to the growth of their staff members.

The third area of influence centered around principals' own leadership roles and styles. The respondents described the positive influence of visionary leadership, shared decision-making, and team building. Their descriptions of strategies emulated leadership characteristics found in literature describing

dynamics of facilitative leadership (Asayesh, 1993; Barth, 1993). Visionary leadership was used as a tool for implementing middle school practices. As principals conveyed vision to staff, they became more willing to participate in professional growth and change related to implementation of practices. Principals felt shared decision-making also contributed positively to the professional growth process. When staff members shared in the decision-making process, their enthusiasm for professional growth increased. In addition, principals spoke about the influence of team building. Team building, according to some, provided a means for developing support networks within the building. In this way, the risks associated with growth and change became less threatening. As team members became supportive of each other, the positive impact of professional growth was more evident.

Other Factors Contributing to Effective Leadership

In response to the third research question, respondents talked about factors other than professional growth experiences which, according to their perceptions, contributed to their effectiveness as a leader. Responses in this section were grouped according to themes. They were: Commitment to Middle Level, Relationships with Others, Intuitive Knowledge, and Personal Characteristics. The reader should understand, however, that the delineation of areas was formulated by the researcher to provide clarity for the reader and were defined as such by the respondents.

Some of the findings in this area parallel ideas found in literature and research reports relating to leadership style and implementation of middle

school practices. Other findings were unique to the respondents in the study. The variation of responses somewhat complicated the discussion of the topic area. The influence of leadership styles is difficult to accuarately portray, as was noted in the research by Lewis (1993) and others. However, one of the connecting links was the respondents' insights regarding leadership styles. In a number of instances pimicpals did describe what they saw as a relationship between their leadership styles or personal attributes and the success of implementing middle school practices. For example, they explained their personal commitment to their jobs and to middle school. Commitment, according to the respondents, was an important aspect of success when describing themselves, principals talked about the importance of being enthusiastic, highly motivated, and risk takers. These personal characteristics of commitment, enthusiasm, and risk-taking, were characteristics of effective leadership styles described in the literature (Lewis, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Nearly all of the principals articulated the importance of having good relationships with their staff, students, and other contacts. For example, one principal said, "I love them (students) and they know that . . . I think the kids respond to me because they know I sincerely care about them." In their descriptions of good relationships with staff, principals stressed the importance of being honest and caring. However, the importance of good relationships with staff was conveyed as very important, respondents did not perceive relationships with others as paramount to high performance.

Finally, Intuitive Knowledge was a reoccuring theme respondents

referred to when they described their ability to effectively use knowledge and skills to perform tasks without training to develop the knowledge or skill used. In explanation of this practice, several principals talked about their personal or intuitive understanding of educational concepts and explained how they went about finding research-based information to validate their beliefs. One principal who felt he/she knew a lot about appropriate strategies for teaching middle school students before receiving formal training said, "it (formal training) didn't really teach me much information that I didn't already know. I did learn, however, that the original junior highs were created with the same belief systems as middle schools now have."

The experiences reported by principals support research by others concerning the important connections between leadership styles and personal attributes and effective leadership. According to some of the leading researchers in school leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Sergiovanni, 1984,1992) effective school leadership may have roots in personal attributes of the leaders. Studies which focused on the individuality of principals suggest that the character of the principal is equally as important as the skills of the principal (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; De Boise, 1984; Manasse, 1984). In fact, Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) went to the extreme of claiming that almost anyone could learn the necessary skills to function as a principals. They insisted the character of the person was the determining factor between acceptable and excellent principal. In addition, they supported the hypothesis that "leadership styles cannot be developed through training" (Lewis, 1993, p.

3).

Conclusions

1) Collaboration with others is a strategy contributing to effective professional growth and development experiences for middle school principals.

As principals reported professional growth experiences, they repeatedly emphasized the importance of collaboration. The respondents stressed the importance of talking with others to decrease their feelings of isolation, increase their technical knowledge, and develop shared vision within their schools.

2) The context of individual settings, the dynamics of change, and personal characteristics are factors that influence the effectiveness of school leaders.

In addition to professional growth experiences, principals described the interaction between external conditions and their personal leadership qualities as these related to their success. Respondents in this study perceived their personal leadership roles, styles, and characteristics as factors which are important to their overall effectiveness. It is interesting to note that the leadership qualities and personal characteristics described by the respondents are very similar to the descriptions offered by the nominators as criteria for determining exemplary principals (see Appendix A).

Implications

As I considered the importance of the conclusions to the study, I saw several implications. First, I believe it is important for in-service providers to

consider the significance of providing time for principals time for principals to talk with each other about new concepts and ideas. According to the findings of this study, as well as other studies, (Asayesh, 1993; Barth, 1993) discussion time provides an opportunity for individuals to make connections between the new ideas and their own knowledge base. Making connections between new ideas and an existing knowledge allows theory-based information to become more relevant to principals' lives. Consequently, the new information is more likely to be used in the work setting. In-service providers might consider accomplishing this task by dividing available time into two segments. One segment could be used for the introduction of new ideas or concepts and the other segment for processing the information with others.

In-services providers may also want to consider the importance of the learner being involved in the instructional planning process. This could be done in several ways. For example, in-service providers could do an oral survey with their audience to determine needs prior to beginning an instructional presentation. The learners, then, could give the presenter feedback regarding their prior knowledge of a given topic. In this way, learner input, becomes similar to the use of a pre-test which educators use to avoid redundancy of information in a setting where learners have a range of differing needs. The instructor, then, may elect to group the participants into sections according to need. In this scenario one group may be working with printed information while another group is involved in direct instruction. A third group might be ready for another activity such as writing an action plan. These options provide a wide

range of services to diverse learning groups.

The second implication is directed to district leaders in a position to influence participation in professional growth activities of principals. I believe these people may assist principals in the process of implementing middle school practices by supporting professional growth efforts. If, in fact, superintendents and/or board members understand the process of professional growth, and have realistic expectations for principals who participate in such activities, the process of implementing change may be expedited. For example, if district leaders are supportive of professional growth experiences, principals are more likely to take the risks necessary to improve educational instruction. Leaders should be aware that this may include professional growth in informal settings. Small group meetings and study groups, for example, are reported as effective means of professional growth. On the other hand, if superintendents and/or board members infer that a principal who participates in growth activities is incompetent, principals may feel inhibited about participation in professional growth experiences (Barth, 1993).

The final implication is important for individuals responsible for hiring middle school principals. From my perspective these individuals should consider the leadership styles and personal characteristics of prospective candidates. Effective middle school principals are those who truly enjoy working with adolescents. The principals in this study were very satisfied with the middle school setting and enthusiastically promoted the concepts. They spoke endearingly of middle school students and teachers. This is an

interesting finding, because, as stated earlier only one set out to work as a middle school principal. The respondents were extremely friendly and enthusiastic about their jobs. In addition, they were flexible and willing to accommodate the researcher in any way possible. The intensity of their personalities may be important in consideration of leadership of middle schools.

While I feel it is important for individuals responsible for hiring middle school principals to consider their leadership style and personal characteristics, I also recognize the difficulties associated with evaluating these areas. I agree with DeBoise (1984) who said, "research needs to clarify how different styles and personalities interact with specific contexts to produce desirable or undesirable consequences" (p. 19). Although there may be difficulties associated with evaluating leadership styles and characteristics, there is evidence indicating that principals who have excellent personal relation skills and are deeply concerned about others may be more effective in middle schools than those who have other outstanding attributes. There are multiple measures of these areas including personal interviews and standardized intstruments. A variety of measurement strategies could be useful for individuals responsible for hiring middle school principals.

Recommendations

1. This study focused on a homogenous group of principals considered to be exemplary by their peesr. Study of a more diverse group could provide additional insight into this topic.

2. A study of the relationship between a principal's on-the-job

effectiveness and the nature of that principal's collaboration with others may yield important information. Based on the fact that principals perceive themselves as isolated and need emotional and technical support, the impact of collaboration with others should be further investigated as an important professional growth and development.

3. The relationship between leadership styles and success as a middle school leader needs further investigation. An analysis of the leadership styles of exemplary middle school principals could be done with a commercial tool designed to measure leadership styles. This, in turn, might provide helpful information to professionals considering a career in middle school administration, and those who are involved in the hiring process.

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Appendixes

Appendix A Criteria for Nominations

Criteria Offered	Frequency of Response
Understands middle school concepts	5
Understands developmental characteristics of adolescents	4
Child-centered (doing what's right for kids)	4
Understands the change process	3
Leadership at local or state level	3
Goal-oriented	2
Growth oriented	2
Professionally minded	2
Visionary	2
Ability to accept ambiguity	2
Good climate in their buildings	2
Confronts teachers who are not performing at expected level	1
Conscientious	1
Attends a lot of professional meetings	1

Appendix B Interview Protocol *

Question One - What professional growth experiences have effectively contributed to the development of your knowledge and skills needed to implement middle school practices?

Probes:

a) Tell me about your involvement with ....(name common experience which has not been described, e.g. university coursework, professional organizations, professional reading) .
b) How did you become aware of the differences between middle schools and junior high?
c) Can you think of any other professional growth experiences you have had related to your job?
d) What has been most significant about ...(name experience given by respondent, e.g., collaboration, involvement with professional organization) ?
e) What do you like best about your experience with.....?
f) Tell me about your relationship with some of the people with whom you collaborate.

Question Two - What are the primary conditions which impact your opportunities to participate in professional development activities?

Probes:

a) There are many principals who are not as active in professional growth as you seem to be. What has helped you become so active?
b) Have you felt any barriers or obstacles in your quest to grow?
c) Are there any other conditions you feel have affected your professional growth?

Question Three - Are there other factors that you feel contribute to your ability to provide exemplary leadership in your middle school?

Probes:

a) Can you think of any other concerns related toyour professional growth?
b) Could you like to talk about any other experiences related to your professional growth or your experiences as a middle school leader?
c) What concernsdto you have related to the future of your professional growth?

* The interview questions actually used during the interview process may differ in wording. The questions listed above reflect the intent of the interview process.

Appendix C Interviewee Consent Form

Name Date

School District

Number of years as principal

Number of years in this position

This interview will be tape recorded. A written text will be made for the purpose of my dissertation and it may be reviewed by my dissertation committee. The information gathered during this interview is for the purpose of furthering our understanding of professional growth and development of middle school principals. The contents of the final dissertation will be made public, however, your identity will not be revealed.

Your signature indicates you understand the purpose and process of the study and give your permission to use the information from this interview for the purpose of my dissertation and any other publication that may result from this project.

Principal _____ Date _____